



KATHARINE TYNAN



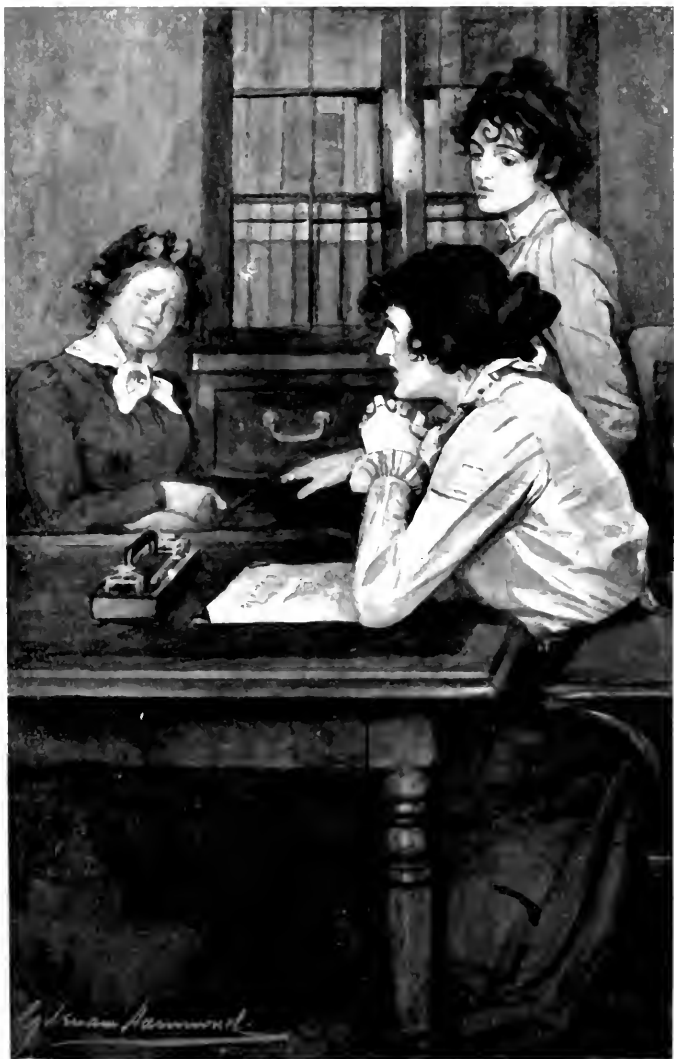
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Three Fair Maids





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“WELL, NUALA,” SAID ELIZABETH, “ARE YOU GOING TO HELP US?”

Three Fair Maids

OR

The Burkes of Derrymore

BY

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Author of "The Handsome Brandons" &c.

WITH TWELVE ILLUSTRATIONS BY G. DEMAINE HAMMOND, R.I.

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THREE FAIR MAIDS.

CHAPTER I.

A REVOLUTIONARY SCHEME.

YOUR dear father would never have permitted it," said mother, looking at Elizabeth in a scared way.

"Perhaps we should never have needed it if he had lived," Elizabeth replied. "He might have foreseen the storm that was coming, and taken the little money he possessed out of the unstable land. But now his provision for us has vanished, and what are we to do? You would not have us be governesses?"

"I would not, Betty. Governesses are ill-paid, and are destined to lead a miserably lonely life, poor things. I can't imagine you a governess, child."

Elizabeth laughed.

"Nor can I imagine myself one. In the first place I'm too good-looking."

"Elizabeth!"

Mother nearly always said "Elizabeth" instead of

"Betty" when she was serious, or a little shocked, as she occasionally was.

"And have too good a conceit of myself."

Mother laughed.

"That is another matter, my dear."

"You see, dear," said Elizabeth persuasively, "this scheme will keep us at home, and all together."

"It has that advantage. But it has many disadvantages. You children go too fast for me. Girls were more timid when I was young, and more retiring."

"The world has swung round since then, motherkin, and there are so many of us women, that we are obliged to do something for ourselves. Besides, we've moved with the times. I am really able to help myself. Perhaps Joan would not be without me; but Joan follows me loyally. You can leave the management of the whole scheme safely to me."

"But Delia! What is to become of Delia, with all those strange folk in our home?"

"Perhaps we shall get no one after all. But—I think the best thing to do with Delia would be to send her off to Madame's. She's always reading, but she's an uneducated little thing. Aren't you, Delia? You haven't a single accomplishment."

Delia's large eyes suddenly filled with tears.

"Dearest Betty," she cried, "don't ask me to go to Paris, quite away from you all, among strangers. I

should die of the loneliness, and the strange faces. Let me stay. I will do anything you like. I will practise every day. I won't read any poetry or story books till I have quite learnt my lessons for Margaret. You needn't mind me about those people. Why, I should run miles from them. Don't you remember the time I went to the children's party, when you took me to stay with Mrs. Blake in Dublin, motherkin, and I burst out crying when a little boy asked me to dance, and had to be taken home?"

"You're not a bit older to-day than you were then," said Elizabeth, "though you're turned seventeen. School is a great place for making people grow up."

"I don't know that I want to grow up," said Delia disconsolately.

"It is true, Betty," I put in, "that she won't run wild about the place as another girl of her age might."

Delia looked at me with disproportionate gratitude.

"She is my baby," said our mother, drawing Delia close, and leaning her cheek to the younger cheek. "She is my baby. Need she go to Madame Leloir's, Betty?"

Looking at them I thought of Sir Patrick Spens:—

"I saw the new moon late yestreen
With the old moon in her arm."

The delicate oval faces, with their mistiness of fine, colourless hair, were exactly like each other, as were the

quiet eyes, limpid and large, and filled with a blue, lambent light.

"Need she go to Madame Leloir's?" I echoed, turning to Elizabeth.

"We went," said Elizabeth, "and we are a credit to Madame. You let us go, little mother. Joan and I shall be jealous."

"Your father was alive then," said our mother. "Besides, you are different, Betty, and so is Joan. Delia is yet a little one. You two were grown girls at her age."

"Let her stay," I said. "Margaret Synnott can see to her. We shall keep the west wing for ourselves, and the gardens. Delia need not come in contact with—the visitors."

"So you are determined on your scheme, you children," said our mother, absently caressing Delia's hair. Delia still clung to her as though she were not quite sure she was yet escaped from a danger.

"You will see how we shall carry it out," said Elizabeth, with a flash of her dark eyes. "But first, to settle one thing, you don't want to go to Madame's, Delia?"

Delia looked at her sideways with the irresistible appeal of a child.

"Let me stay, Bet. I shall be so good. I shall love to know what you and Joan are doing; but I shall stay

with Margaret. Why, I would run miles from those strange people."

"I dare say you would. That is why I wanted you to go to Madame's. You can't always be a little hare, flying to your covert at the least alarm."

"I shall come to the drawing-room, then, or do what you like, only don't send me to Madame's. It is so very far away. I should die to feel that the sea lay between me and Ardeelish."

"I dare say you would," said Elizabeth. "And after all Madame's would not suit her a bit, would it, Joan? Think of the French girls with their chatter of chiffons and *dots*, and this—mouse!"

"Madame was highly recommended to me," said our mother, with a sigh of relief, "and the result justified my parting with my girls for so long; but I am glad that I may keep this one."

"Why do you say 'may keep', motherkin?" asked Elizabeth, with a thrill in her voice. "Don't you know you are mistress of Ardeelish and us, and your will law to us?"

Our mother shook her head gently.

"Your father took all the troublesome affairs of life off my shoulders, Elizabeth. You are a dear, good girl, and I trust your judgment for us all; it is a great deal to put on young shoulders, but you are older than your years both you and Joan. If I did not feel that you

were fitter for this world's affairs than I, I would ask you to give up this scheme."

"And I would give it up if there were any other way to keep us at Ardeelish. I can think of no other way. Would you live in genteel poverty in Dublin or London?"

Our mother shook her head again.

"You know I could not leave Ardeelish. When your father had to give up Derrymore because we could not keep it after his uncle had stopped his allowance, we came to Ardeelish. Ardeelish is more than a house to me."

"I know it, dearest. That is why we must keep you in it. Don't find it too bitter. I have thought and thought, and could strike no other scheme."

"Do I hinder you?" our mother said repentantly. "Forgive me, Elizabeth, and you, Joan; but the idea of receiving strangers in our home must be a shock to me."

"We will do all the management," Elizabeth said eagerly. "You need not come in contact with the people except to sit at the head of the table at meals. You will look so beautiful with your brocade and your point lace. What matter if the brocade be a bit faded and your lace mended by Nuala's clever fingers? I don't think we could do without you there. Seeing you, people will realize that we are gentlefolk, though we are obliged to have paying guests, and will behave accordingly."

"You don't think, Elizabeth, that anyone will come who would not behave well?"

"Only staid, old-fashioned people will come to us, dear. There will be no amusements for them, only fishing and boating, and the hunting in winter, and a little shooting. These are the pursuits of gentlefolk."

"They have a grand new ball-room at the hotel at the other end of the lake, with dances three times a week, and a steam launch, and personally-conducted parties, and no end of fine doings," I put in.

"Now, motherkin. We hated to hear that they had opened the new hotel; yet see, it will draw off all the objectionable people from us."

"They have such smart rooms," I said. "Nuala's second cousin, Mary Sweeney's husband's niece, is a chambermaid there. Nuala says the bedrooms are thrown away altogether for sleeping in. 'Tis ball-rooms they ought to be, with lords and ladies on the flure."

Our mother smiled faintly.

"We are rather dull and faded, Betty," she said. "All the rooms need doing up, and the billiard-table is, I fear, a little bit antiquated. I'm afraid your—guests won't like it."

"Indeed, then, they'll have to do with it," said Elizabeth, with a toss of her head. "We don't want the kind of people who can't appreciate our great, bare rooms, full of sweetness and cleanliness if of little else. Besides,

little mother, the fashions have come back to our old chintzes and old brocades and old furniture. The glories Nuala described for Joan are all very well for a hotel. Ardeelish is exquisite just as it is. The people who will come to us will be satisfied."

"What will you do for butcher's-meat?" asked mother. Elizabeth lifted hands of amazement.

"You dear," she said, "to think of your asking so practical a question!"

"I can be practical at times," said mother. "I never cared much for butcher's-meat myself, but I know there are people who like it every day."

"I've thought it all out," said Elizabeth. "The new hotel gets its supplies by steamer to Carnaross. I shall get mine the same way. I don't think they will always want butcher's-meat, however. With Joan's chickens, and the game, and the lake trout, and salmon from the river, and all other kinds of fish up from the curing station, I think they will do very well."

"You do not propose to take many—guests?" asked our mother.

"Not more than ten or twelve. It is as many as we can accommodate. I have talked with Mrs. Langrishe about it. She has put me up to all sorts of things. It ought not to be so bad for you as for her, motherkin. She was the pioneer. Besides, hers is a hotel, open to all comers; we can choose."

"The Langrishes are not as old a family as the Burkes; yet I wondered how Ellen could bring herself to do it," said mother, shaking her head.

"She is a woman of a fine spirit," said Elizabeth. "She showed us the way, else we should be all crying over our rents as though we thought crying would bring them back; or huddling in homes for decayed gentlewomen, talking over our past glories when we were not fighting over them. I should like to see myself a decayed gentlewoman!"

I burst out laughing. Elizabeth, with her air of spirit and race, her valiant and conquering young beauty, was as unlike a decayed gentlewoman as could well be imagined.

"You young people go too fast for me," said our mother, still with her air of soft regret. "Not but what I am proud of my girls, though they have left their old mother so far behind."

"You will always have an image of yourself," said Elizabeth, "while you have Delia. I am the worldly-wise, rough-and-tumble—"

"My beautiful Elizabeth!" said our mother with a shocked air.

"Rough-and-tumble, self-confident, unafraid young woman of the present day. You are more of the other world, dearest, one foot on earth, and one over the threshold. You keep the door open for us; you keep the atmosphere of another world about us."

"I am very little use for this," sighed mother, still caressing Delia's nebulous hair.

She was silent for a minute. Then she asked a wistful question.

"It is the only thing, Elizabeth?"

"The best way I can find, motherkin. Would I do it else, seeing it pains you?"

"You have looked into everything?"

"Everything. There is practically nothing left but this house, the woods, the lake, the bog, the mountain—scarce a rood of arable land for which rent is paid."

"It is well I have such a clever daughter. I never could strike out a new way. I kept hoping matters would improve."

"They will not," said Elizabeth. "I see nothing ahead that will not deal hardly with the landlords. The old state of things will never return."

"How much you know about it, Elizabeth!"

"It is time we should learn. After all, they have some right on their side. If the land is worth rent they made it so."

"Your father was a just man, Elizabeth."

"Did I seem to say otherwise, my dearest? If so, you misunderstood. But some were not just. Anyhow, we cannot have yesterday back. We must make the best of to-day."

"To think that our name should come to be that of a

person who kept a kind of hotel! Lady Burke's Hotel—how does it sound, children?"

She winced perceptibly, while she pretended to rally herself.

"Drop the name if you like," said Elizabeth quietly.

"But—I do not understand. We shall still be Burkes."

"Let us use your mother's name, mother. Franklin—it is a good old English name; but it will not have the same associations to people here as Burke. Call yourself Mrs. Franklin to the guests."

"How are you going to get your guests?"

"Joan, sit down and write," said Elizabeth.

I obeyed as I always have obeyed my imperious elder sister.

Elizabeth began to walk up and down the room with her hands clasped behind her back, dictating:

"‘A lady, living in the West of Ireland’—have you that down, Joan?—‘the West of Ireland—will receive in her’—we had better say mansion, it is better than ‘house’ in this case—‘will receive in her mansion a limited number of ladies and gentlemen. There is excellent sport—hunting, fishing, shooting, boating.’"

"The boats are not very safe, Elizabeth," our mother said.

"Then they needn't go in them, dearest. They haven't to earn their living by going in them like the fishermen. I sha'n't certainly encourage them; not till we can buy a

new boat. Go on, Joan—"boating" you have that in. 'For further particulars apply, Mrs. Franklin'—that is your new name, mother—"Mrs. Franklin, Ardeelish, Ardnamore Lake, Connemara, Ireland."

"Am I to be 'Mrs. Franklin' to our guests?" asked mother in a disturbed way. "I shall not know myself as Mrs. Franklin. It doesn't seem—truthful, Elizabeth."

"It is your professional name, dearest, don't you see? as if you were an author or a musician. These people have no right to your own dear proper name."

"Why, now you put it that way, Elizabeth, it seems right enough. You mean that I am, to myself and my friends, Sir Jasper Burke's widow; as the hostess of paying guests, I am—Mrs. Franklin."

"That is precisely it."

"I shall shut my eyes and try to imagine we are keeping up great state at Derrymore, and that I am entertaining the county as your father's wife had a right to do. I shall come back to hard facts when someone calls me Mrs. Franklin. Still, I am glad it is not to be Burke. And Franklin is really a name I have a right to."

"Won't they find out we are Burkes, not Franklins?" I asked.

"Perhaps; it hardly matters if they do," said Elizabeth. "We are not changing our name for any nefarious reason. If they know, being gentlefolk, they will understand. Now, Joan, copy that advertisement for

me. We have to send it to—let me see—the *Morning Post*, the *Standard*, the *Pall Mall Gazette*, the *Field*. I shall think of some others.”

“How do you know their names, Elizabeth?” asked mother, with gentle admiration.

“It’s the easiest thing possible to find out,” answered Elizabeth, laughing. “No, Joan, you let it alone. Delia will do it. You come with me for a consultation with Nuala. You are my aide-de-camp.”

Delia seized my pen with delight. We have always loved Delia because of her readiness to do anything for anybody, and to put herself aside.

“Let me do all the writing, Bet,” she said imploringly. “Then I shall feel that I am doing something for you, dear Bet, in return for not sending me away from you all.”

“You silly child,” said Elizabeth; “as if I had any authority at all, any at all!”

Yet there is no doubt that Elizabeth is the masterful one of us, though she likes to think she does not rule us.

CHAPTER II.

WAYS AND MEANS.

THE room to which I followed Elizabeth had been our father’s. It was a plain, severe, business-like place. There he had fulfilled the duties of a country

gentleman, a landlord, and a magistrate. He had received his tenants there, and the men he employed, had signed warrants for the police, had arranged innumerable quarrels between our poor neighbours, and had been the recipient of nearly as many confidences as the priest himself.

The people trusted his kindness as they did his wisdom, and neither quality ever failed them. Fortunately our father was not a busy man apart from the incessant business of the little world around him. As a child I remember how a path was worn through the grass to the side-door, by which one reached that room, from the incessant passage of the people of the village.

Did two neighbours quarrel, or was it a question for arbitration, the parties would fly in the utmost state of undress "to tell Sir Jasper about it", each striving to get before the other one. He spent all his mornings in that room, and access was easy, for the outer door stood hospitably open. Around the walls, in book-cases with glass doors, were rows of law-books, as well as books relating to the physicking of animals, to farming, gardening, and the proper keeping of live stock. He used to find it efficacious to read the law-books to a pair of combatants. If Mary Brady had "clawed the head off" Judy Gallagher, and the latter had retaliated by writing the map of Ireland on her assailant's countenance, my father would

bid the pair be seated while he took down a solemn-looking tome and read them the deliberations of the law on the nature of assaults, with special reference to barratry, champerty, and assault and battery.

By the time he had reached the third page he usually found that the snorting and panting of the combatants had ceased, and that they were listening to the formal language in open-mouthed admiration. Afterwards it was easy for him to adjudicate on the question in dispute, and to send them away friends again in their common admiration of his wisdom and store of legal learning.

There was a plain writing-table in the room, a few severe office-chairs, and a heavy iron safe.

Behind the table Elizabeth seated herself, having rung the bell for Nuala, our old housekeeper and cook, who presently arrived — an apple-cheeked, elderly woman with very blue eyes, and knots of violet ribbon in her black lace cap.

As she took the chair Elizabeth indicated she wiped away a large tear with the back of her hand, and then with an air of enduring the worst, sat smoothing her little black silk apron.

"Well, Nuala," said Elizabeth, "are you going to help us?"

"Is it help yez to your own destruction, Miss Bet? Well, then, I am; and may I be forgiven for it! Sure, if

I didn't, someone else would, an' rob yez right an' left into the bargain."

"I am glad, Nuala. I don't know what we should have done without you," said Elizabeth graciously.

"'Deed, then, I don't know ayther, Miss Bet. How's her ladyship takin' it?"

"Like yourself, Nuala. It's a shock to her, but she trusts me and believes me when I tell her there's nothing else for it."

"'Tis the blood tells. Sure, 'tis a bitterness for her. Little she thought she'd live to see the day them fellows, for all the world like spiders wid their little wheely things under them, 'ud come struttin' into the drawin'-room of Ardeelish House, makin' free wid your sofas an' chairs, an' shoutin' for shavin'-water worse nor pigs."

"I don't suppose we shall have many cyclists, Nuala," said Elizabeth; "but if we do they'll be gentlemen. The bicycle is very fashionable now, Nuala, both for ladies and gentlemen."

"I can't believe it," said Nuala obstinately. "Them that is used to horseflesh 'ud never look at the like. Little Kitty Sweeney was tellin' me they'd put the life across you below at the Hotel bawlin' for 'bawths', as they calls them, when they comes in from killin' their-selves. 'Cock them up wid baths,' says I; 'baths is for quality, an' a new notion wid them.' I remember ould Lord Dunglass—I was rared on the estate—tellin' my

mother that he was never dipped but wance, and that was by an ould bathin'-woman at Salthill when he was no more nor a babby. He said he let a screech out of him that med her nearly drown him, an' he couldn't be induced to go near the salt water, or any water, after. He was as beautiful a skinned gentleman as ever I seen."

"I dare say," said Elizabeth absently. "But I want to talk about business now, so never mind Lord Dunglass. You think, Nuala, that you prefer to keep the cooking as well as the housekeeping in your own hands?"

"Would I let my copper preserving-pan an' my shapes an' my saucepans into the hands of a lot o' idle hussies?"

"It may be hard work, Nuala. You may have so many meals to prepare every day, and so many servants to look after. You would have quite enough to do as housekeeper."

"I'm not afraid of hard work, Miss Bet, for myself nor them under me. I'll have a kitchen-maid, I suppose. *She* won't let the grass grow under her feet, I promise you."

"Very well, Nuala, you can have your kitchen-maid of course. But I expect you'll come and tell me one of these days that you've got too much work to do, and you want to resign one of your positions."

"You'll get tired of it yourself, Miss Bet, sooner. Sure young ladies like yourselves can have no head for business. Where could yez get it from?"

"I suppose we must have got it from the Burtons. You forget that our grandmother was a Burton."

"'Deed, then, I don't, Miss Bet. She didn't look it. She was an elegant-lookin' crathur to the day of her death. You'd never think to look at her that she kem of business people. I suppose ould Mr. Peter's alive still, Miss Bet?"

"He is sure to be, Nuala, though we never hear of him. We should probably have heard if he were dead."

"What is he doin' while his sister's grandchildher are goin' to make shows o' themselves keepin' open house for the world?"

"How should I know, Nuala?" said Elizabeth, laughing. "Perhaps he got married himself. We may have a whole lot of cousins we know nothing about."

"I seen him once, Miss Bet. He looked a hard nut to crack. But he wouldn't demane himself the way you're talkin' about. He might grudge yez the money in his lifetime, but he'd never lave it from yez when he'd be gone."

"You are romancing, Nuala. Like the rest of us you'd rather be looking for the crock of gold than earning dirty coppers. You forget that Uncle Peter was furiously angry with papa about his marriage."

"The mischief bother him for impidence! He thought because his sister married a Burke—agin' his will too, I heard tell—that he owned the master, body and bones.

He little knew the spirit of a Burke, or how little his money-bags counted wid Sir Jasper agin the little lady he fell in love wid. Your mother was a rale beauty in them days. I used to think myself that she was like a fairy. There's none of yez a patch on her, though Miss Delia favours her. Little your father, God rest him, cared when he saw her that she hadn't a penny to her name, an' lived in a ruined ould barrack of a place, the daughter of the poorest and proudest gentleman in Connaught."

"He—Uncle Peter—thought the marriage he had arranged for papa, with his own money added, would have made the Burkes enormously rich."

"What good is money?" sighed Nuala; "we can't carry it to the grave wid us."

"That is a wisdom you can't teach the world. However, I don't know why we're talking about Uncle Peter. He is gone out of our lives long ago. We have nothing to do with him."

"You're a bit like him, Miss Bet—may I be forgiven for sayin' it—only handsomer. You've got the masterful way wid you, but softer like. Why wouldn't it be? for her ladyship has the grace of God about her if ever I seen it in mortal. Ould Mr. Peter, an' your grandmother too, had just your eyes."

"You're sure it's not Joan, Nuala. I don't want very much to be like the Burtons."

"No, then, it isn't Miss Joan. She's a Burke—dark-blue eyes, wavy black hair, an' the whitest of skins. She's Irish all the world over."

"And I'm English?"

"I can't help it, honey, you are. I wish th' ould gentleman could see you. He'd be proud of you. He ought to be proud even yet to lave his dirty guineas to the Burkes."

"You are too conservative, Nuala. Money is a great power in the world nowadays."

"I dare say," said Nuala indifferently; "but I've no politics, Miss Bet. I'd always a great *gra* for Mr. Gladstone—ye wor sayin' I was a Conservative—he was near as fine a man as Dan O'Connell, an' well-disposed to us, so he was."

"I thought this was to be a business conversation, Nuala."

"Is it because it was about ould Mr. Peter Burton, Miss Bet?"

"About our own more pressing business. Uncle Peter's mills will take care of themselves and him. How soon do you think the house can be ready for visitors?"

"If 'twas the lords and the ladies we was used to I'd say give me a week. But since it isn't—"

"Don't be regretting what can't be helped, Nuala. Since it isn't, I want the house ready by the 1st of July at latest."

"'Tis the 10th of June, Miss Bet. You were always terrible impetuous."

"You've only to get the bedrooms out of their shutters and undress. The rest of the house will do; you've kept it as bright as your own cap-ribbons."

"I'm obleeged to you, Miss Bet, but claned it shall be from top to bottom if the life laves me the day it's finished, and that'll be the last day of June."

"You cleaned it from top to bottom in April. It can't want much doing now."

"Listen, Miss Bet, 'tis for the credit of the family. If 'twas your aiguals was comin' I'd lave it be. The quality feels for the quality. But them little *leprechauns* that comes on the wheely things—would I have them talkin' about Irish dirt? I know my duty to the family better."

"Never mind Nuala, Bet," said I, intervening; "she's determined to be pessimistic about our visitors, but she'll put her shoulder to the wheel for all that, you'll see."

"You're right, Miss Joan. If it was to one o' them little wheels, an' wheel them into the lake, 'twould be doin' it an' welcome I'd be."

Nuala beamed all over at her own small joke, then became suddenly grave again.

"Where am I to get curtains for them rooms, an' new crockery, an' a hearth-rug for the Yallow Bedroom, an' fenders an' fire-irons for the Blue Room an' Lady Eliza-

beth's room—not to spake of kitchen things, an' the leg that's twisted under the dining-room sofy, an' a new counterpane for the four-poster bed in the West Room, an' all in no more time than you'd take to turn round?"

"You'll have to do without them, Nuala dear," said Elizabeth coaxingly. "You're so clever you can make everything look beautiful without any means, or cook a fine dinner without any materials, with anyone I ever heard of."

"When 'twas done for love, not for black strangers that'll think their dirty money gives them the right to walk into Ardeelish, where they ought to be creepin' on their bended knees."

"I am more troubled about the state of the boats," sighed Elizabeth; "they're leaky, and I can see no prospect of getting new till this business begins to pay."

"Cock them up wid new!" said Nuala scornfully. "Let them have the ould."

"And drown them, Nuala?" said I. "You know it will be the boating season, and there is so little else to do."

"Well, then, if they were fools enough to go boatin' in leaky boats 'twould be the mercy of the world, so it 'ud be, to drive holes in the bottom an' spill the lot of them out in the lake."

Elizabeth and I laughed. We were familiar with Nuala's strong remedies.

"How many additional servants will you want?" asked Elizabeth, coming to practical matters.

"Miss Bet, if you'll lave it to me: I don't like to see yourself an' Miss Joan botherin' your purty heads about the like. I don't mind yez playin' at business, like Miss Joan there wid the hins an' the chickens an' the eggs. Sure I knew she'd make nothin' of it; but I like to see yez happy wid your little ways of amusin' yerselves."

"I'm sure I'm doing very well, Nuala," said I, crest-fallen.

"If Miss Bet does no better wid the hotel we'll all be sold out o' the place widin the twelvemonth. How many chickens did ye rear this season, Miss Joan, dearie?"

"Thirteen, Nuala, but they are very good ones. You can't expect me to be very clever the first year."

"Nor any other year, child. Thirteen chickens out of maybe as many settin's! There, what would a little lady like yourself know of rearin' fowl? You'll second Miss Bet grand in anything she does. Sure 'twas the same when you wor a weeshy child. You'd trapeze after her wherever she went, an' many's the time she carried you home to me—half-carried, half-dragged you, for you'd walk as long as you could put a foot under you—an' you in a terrible state after you'd rowled in a bog-hole or tumbled out of a tree. Miss Bet was always cleverer nor you. 'Tis because Miss Bet's for doin' that you

are. There, don't look so downcast, child. What would one of your blood know about the ways of hins an' chickens?"

"You must teach me then, Nuala," I said almost tearfully. "I want to be like Mary Maguire in the glen who has an egg from her hen even at Christmas-time."

"Why, bless the child, Mary Maguire's hin sleeps wid her. You wouldn't like that, Miss Joan."

"Indeed I should not, Nuala. Is that the only way?"

"'Tis the best way I know. An' to let 'em roost in the room wid you, the crathurs. They're terrible fond o' bein' wid yourself. 'Tis cruel, so it is, to be lockin' them up in little contrivances of boxes. There's that Boord, now, that's takin' the poor people's hins in hand. The people do be sayin' 'tis a fat proud sort o' hin the Boord does be sendin' down to them, more for appearance than layin', an' terrible set up about the little trousers they do have on their legs. They could no more fly over the house like the hins we're used to than they could dance a hornpipe. An' as for sittin' by the childer an' atin' a bit from their hands, they're too proud-stomached for that. Dyin' it is they'll be on the poor people if they don't have the same male as quality, an' as for layin' an egg 'tis the last thing they'd think about. Sure the ould hins 'ud live an' lay on the peelin's o' the potatoes."

"I don't know after all that we've settled much,

Nuala," said Elizabeth, "except that we've discovered Miss Joan cannot rear fowl. I'll have to be more business-like to succeed with my scheme."

"Och, you'll succeed, you'll succeed, never fear! 'Tis only my talk. You don't favour the Burtons for nothin'; an' as for my part, Miss Bet, lave me alone. It'll be done. I'll get them sarvants now. Little Kitty wants to come, an' if she only lifted a finger half them girls an' boys there 'ud follow her. I can pick what I like for sarvants. Sure they'd rather sarve the Burkes than a Company, that's no master nor mistress at all. Just you see, child, to the big things, an' trust me for the small."

We looked at each other with a smile. After all it would have been very uncomfortable if Nuala had set herself steadily against our scheme. Even Elizabeth is a little bit afraid of Nuala, though she carries a high hand with her. Nuala would die for any one of us any day of the week, and knows more about our affairs than we know ourselves. Nominially Nuala serves us; really we are far more in awe of Nuala than she is of us.

CHAPTER III.

“KINVARRA IS COMING HOME.”

SO we are to call you ‘Mrs. Franklin’,” said Georgie O’Hara, leaning by the inlaid marble mantel-piece of our mother’s boudoir, and swishing the skirt of her well-cut habit negligently with a riding-whip.

“I hope not, ~~my~~ dear,” said our mother soberly. “Certainly not within these walls, and I don’t look to have you as a guest, except in my private capacity.”

She blushed as she said it; a faint, tender colour that rose in her delicate, pale cheeks, and ebbed again.

Georgie O’Hara looked at her with frank admiration.

“I hope Mrs. Franklin won’t be so busy that Lady Burke won’t have time to receive us,” she said. “I love to come here, Lady Burke, though I always feel too big for this room somehow. I suppose people like Madge and me are only possible in open air.”

“I am always glad to see you and Madge. It is very kind of you both to like to come to see me.”

“Oh, we know what’s what; don’t we, Madge? and though we couldn’t imitate your ways to save our lives, yet we appreciate them all the more; yes, just as a man might; yes upon my word we do, dear Lady Burke.”

Again our mother blushed like a girl.

She was sitting darning a table-cloth by the French

window of the room she had taken for her own in the west wing, which we were going to reserve for ourselves. It was a pretty room of white and gold, very much faded and tarnished, but full of a light from the white walls and the white furniture which it needed, since the windows opened on little paths where the rose-bushes grew thickest. The garden's boundary hedge of holly and privet, cut into fantastic peacocks and swans and little towers and battlements, screened the windows from the park without, where the green turf rolled smoothly away to the lake's edge.

"Don't you think these are wonderful girls of mine?" mother asked, looking at us with affection.

"Well, of course, Mrs. Langrishe showed them the way. Otherwise there would have been a tremendous scandal about it, and we should all have been asking each other why they couldn't go out as governesses or companions—there are no such things as companions, by the way; it is a situation which exists only in novels—or else starve genteelly at home. We could never have forgiven it, Lady Burke, really, if Mrs. Langrishe had not led the way."

Mother looked at her in a scared way.

"I did not know our neighbours would think of it in that way, Georgie," she said; "I thought only of the effect on ourselves."

"Never mind Georgie," said Madge O'Hara, who was

on the other side of the mantel-piece. She and Georgie, brilliant brunettes both, stood like a pair of Caryatides. They always stood or lounged when they could not sit on a table or a window-ledge, as though they had taken a vow against sitting on a chair. "Never mind Georgie, dear Lady Burke, the county won't boycott you, no matter what you choose to do. You are the saving salt of us all."

"I'm sure I don't know why you are so good to me, girls," mother said, turning her table-cloth about to find another hole.

"I wish I could save your eyes by doing that for you," put in Georgie; "but I could no more darn than I could make a watch. Just look at the rent in my habit which I cobbled myself, because Madge's damages take the whole time and attention of our Sophie to repair."

She held up a disreputable bit of skirt, held together by a few rough stitches.

"You poor child!" said mother, suddenly pitiful, and dropping her damask to the ground. "Come over here till I mend it for you. Oh, Georgie, Georgie, why wouldn't you learn to sew?"

"Poor old Fräulein did her best to teach us that as well as other useful arts and elegant accomplishments, but Madge and I would never learn. She couldn't do anything with us, the poor old duffer. We gave her a horrible life. 'Ah! the wild Irish!' she would say, lift-

ing her poor, old, fat hands. She was fond of us two, and her dreams were haunted by our riding bare-backed horses, climbing trees, and half-drowning ourselves in the bog. Poor old Fräulein! what a blessing for her when she went home and married her Pastor Fritz! She had not breathed freely for years; and, as she complained, the older we became the worse we behaved."

"You made her marriage possible after all, dear Georgie."

It was Georgie's turn to blush now.

"It was a little, little thing, dear Lady Burke, so piteously little, that she needed to marry on. And she would have gone on cheerfully trying to save it up till the last remnant of her comeliness had vanished. I shall never forget the poor, old, fat, kind face then. 'You haf the bad conduct,' she said; 'ach, how bad! but the goot, goot heart!'"

We laughed at Georgie's mimicry. She was kneeling on the floor by mother, who was mending her torn skirt, and pausing now and again to smile at the honest, sun-burnt face, with its rim of white forehead showing beneath the sailor hat.

"By the way, Madge heard a delectable bit of news the other day," she said, with a flash of white teeth; "only, as it seemed too good to be true, we haven't been talking about it. Besides, your affair put it out of our heads."

"What is it?" asked Elizabeth. "Are the Blazers going to change their master, or has Mr. Crosby entered a horse for Punchestown, or is someone going to give a ball, or what?"

"None of those things. But a marriageable young man, a star of the first magnitude, is about to appear in the lately empty matrimonial sky of this county."

"Georgie, my dear!"

"Dear Lady Burke! stick the needle in me, will you, if I say anything I didn't ought to? But Elizabeth and Joan are quite grown-up now, and as for little Thistle-down over there, she's lost in her poetry-book, and doesn't hear a word I say."

Delia apparently did not hear this reference to herself. She was sitting outside the window, on the grass, with a book on her knees, the pages of which she was devouring. She had been there since lunch, and except for turning the pages now and again, she had made hardly a movement.

"I never could read poetry myself," said Madge, "though I like a rousing song with a chorus, like 'John Peel' or 'Three Jolly Postboys'. But the sensation is my story. Don't you be seizing on it, Georgie. Guess who it is—first Betty, and then Joan. One guess apiece."

"Lord Dunglass," suggested Elizabeth, with an unmoved face.

"He's taking the mud cure somewhere or other for his

sciatica. He likes the mud better than clean water, I'll be bound. Besides, he's too old; none of us would look at him. Come, Joan, it is your turn. Who is Georgie's bright matrimonial star?"

"Mr. Tom Crosby."

For some reason or other Georgie blushed again.

"Tom Crosby! He hasn't a penny, though he has a few good horses, a hunting suit, a racing suit, and his riding-breeches."

"Dear Madge!"

"It is my turn for the needle, Lady Burke. No, it isn't Tom Crosby, and it isn't Lord Dunglass. It's Kinvarra, really Kinvarra at last, escaped alive from bears and lions and tigers and elephants, and going to settle down at home. I shall believe it, mind, when I see him."

"Kinvarra Castle has been closed for a long time," said mother. "I remember it a very pleasant house. I confess I should like to see it opened again."

"That will hardly be," said Madge, "till there is a Lady Kinvarra. Do you think there is a chance for any of us, Betty?"

"You don't suppose he's gone heart-whole till this time of day," said her sister. "He must be twenty-eight at least, and he has been all over the world."

"Carefully avoiding the society of our sex," continued Madge.

"The surer to fall an easy victim," commented Georgie.

Mother forgot to rebuke them. She had finished the rent in Georgie's habit, and was looking straight before her, as much lost to the world as Delia. I thought, glancing at her, that Kinvarra Castle must have been associated for her with some tender memory of our father.

"Do you mean to enter for the Plate, Betty?" asked Georgie. "That is, supposing it is still open?"

"What Plate, Georgie?"

"Why, the Kinvarra Plate, a handicap open to all comers. There will be a big field, my dear."

"I shall not increase it, Georgie. I shall be too busy with my guests."

"I'm glad to hear it. If you girls were entered he wouldn't look at us."

"He would look at you anywhere, Georgie, and at Madge too. He would go a long way to see anything pleasanter."

"There you are, your mother's daughter, always thinking a great deal too well of everyone."

"Besides, such a sportsman would naturally turn to kindred spirits."

"That he wouldn't. He has been out in all the winds and weathers, and a little bright hearth-fire would be his delight."

"Just as well, Georgie," said I; "for what would Mr. Tom Crosby do if he lost his friend?"

"Oh," said Georgie, with the blush that made her look suddenly innocent, "he could keep his friend. Tom Crosby and I are just a pair of good fellows to each other."

"Tom had better go to the Shires, where an heiress might fall in love with him for his pretty seat in the saddle and his fine horsemanship," said Madge.

"He would never know which side his bread was buttered on," said Georgie.

"He's drying up fast into an old bachelor," went on Madge.

"That he isn't," said Georgie with indignation. Then, as if a little ashamed of her outburst, she went over and pulled Delia's ear.

"Here, Mouse," she said; "are you going to enter for the Kinvarra Handicap?"

Delia looked up with her eyes still full of the poetry she was devouring.

"What did you say, Georgie?" she asked in wonder.

"Only some talk about races, my dear. There, go back to your—what is it?—Tennyson. I've never had time to read him myself."

Mother looked up as Georgie spoke to Delia.

"Still on the subject of race-horses, Georgie?" she asked, with an air that showed her as oblivious of those few minutes as Delia herself. "Any more rents, my dear?"

"I don't think there's one, dear Lady Burke. Thank you so much. I am too honoured by your acting as my lady's-maid. It's a charity to Sophy. I know you love doing charity. We rather oppress her with our dual ownership."

"You are not the one to oppress anyone, Georgie."

"You make me believe in myself. I shall try not to be an oppressor. Do you know, I think anyone that loves beasts can't be too bad to the human. It isn't so always the other way about. Queer, isn't it, if the lesser should involve the greater, not the greater the lesser? But I say, it's time for us to be getting home, Madge. I don't know when I've stayed so long anywhere."

"Better wait a little and I'll ring for fresh tea. We expect Mrs. Langrishe this afternoon," said mother.

"She'll be giving you all sorts of tips, I expect. We oughtn't really stay. But she can tell us about Kinvarra, and that is irresistible. Let us hear all about Kinvarra first, and then we will clear the course."

"Kinvarra, what is Kinvarra?" asked Delia, looking up from her book.

"You haven't been listening to us, then?"

"I thought I heard you talking about a horse."

"Ah, well, Kinvarra is a man, my dear. Baron Kinvarra of Kinvarra Castle, in the County of Galway, Ireland."

"Oh, the man that owns Kinvarra Castle," said Delia, going back indifferently to her book. "I thought he was lost."

"Mrs. Langrishe," announced Rose.

Our mother's friend came trailing in, very distinguished-looking with her frosty hair and warm colouring. She kissed us all round affectionately, and then sank into a chair.

"It's very hot," she said, "and my new cloak—I hope you all admire it, girls—is rather heavy for the day that's in it. Do you know, Nora, if you were to ask me, I'd stay for dinner. I thought you'd let one of the girls drive back with me for company if you were good enough to keep me."

"Is it keep you, Ellen?" said mother. "You know you're as welcome as flowers in May. 'Tisn't often we can have you, more's the pity."

"Mrs. Langrishe, do tell us about Lord Kinvarra," cried Georgie O'Hara. "Is it really true that he is coming home?"

"I believe so, my dear."

"For good?"

"Who can say that? He has shown no inclination to settle down anywhere for good yet. Perhaps it will depend on one of you girls."

"He is not bringing a Lady Kinvarra then?"

"He has given me no hint of such a thing. I think

he would have told me if there was anything of the kind in prospect."

Georgie heaved a burlesque sigh of relief, at which even mother laughed, while she shook her head.

"Bless me, Georgie, you don't want Kinvarra," said Mrs. Langrishe, with an upraised finger.

"Why shouldn't I?" asked Georgie, unabashed.

"Oh, well! what would Tom Crosby say?"

"Tom Crosby would say—nothing," said Georgie.

The speech had a little bitterness to my ear. Perhaps Mrs. Langrishe detected it also, for she said, with a change of tone:

"I'll do my duty by you, girls, for I mean to take Kinvarra about and introduce him broadcast as soon as he arrives. I shall be really very much obliged to the one of you who induces him to settle down."

"It would be kinder," murmured Madge, "if you did not introduce him broadcast. Restrict the field, dear Mrs. Langrishe, please."

Mother sighed ever so slightly over her table-cloth; she was so unworldly that the conversation, innocent as it was, distressed her a little. Her friend noticed it, and said:

"We are too naughty for you, Nora, aren't we? Let us talk of something else."

Georgie O'Hara jumped to her feet, and began pulling on her riding-gloves in a great hurry.

"Come along, Madge; we have learnt all we wanted to know. Good-bye, dear Lady Burke. Don't think me a wretch. It's only my joke about Kinvarra, you know. Good-bye, girls. Come and see us when you are not too busy. Good-bye, dear Mrs. Langrishe; don't forget!"

The pair of handsome, high-spirited girls were out of the room in an instant, and, to my mind, some brightness seemed to have gone with them. But to mother I fancied their going was something of a relief. She was always afraid of our picking up the O'Hara ways, which indeed would have sat ill on us. Yet she was very fond of them, and appreciated their good qualities as much as anyone. She was the tenderest woman, our mother, and, born and bred in this county of wild ways, she had an over-scrupulous shrinking from any tendency to what she called mannishness in her own girls. Even Elizabeth's brilliant independence, I think, somewhat distressed her at times.

And to think it was such as she whom we had tangled in the net of our revolutionary enterprise! We might thank Mrs. Langrishe for her half-willing consent. She believed in her old friend, and could not look upon it as quite dreadful to follow where she led. And then Mrs. Langrishe was Elizabeth's godmother, and very proud of her godchild. Elizabeth could have done nothing very blameworthy in following in the steps of one so generally looked up to and praised as Mrs. Langrishe.

CHAPTER IV.

THE FIRST ARRIVALS.

IT was the great day at last, and mother, Elizabeth, and I waited in the drawing-room on the very edge of the new life, for the covered car had gone to meet the first of our guests at Carnaross.

I think we were all a bit fluttered, even Elizabeth, though she would not have acknowledged it for worlds. Mother, with her knitting in her hands, was really the quietest of us. When I had gone to her room after lunch I had found her on her knees. No doubt she had left the issues of this dismaying enterprise, with all its possible pitfalls and perils, in hands where they would be safe.

I had a book on my lap, but I was not reading it. Elizabeth had given the last touch to the roses in the bowls, the last pluck to the cool chintz window-curtains with yellow roses on a white ground; yet her mood was an unsettled one, and every minute she jumped up to poke the fire, or adjust a blind, or alter the position of a chair.

This was our drawing-room as I remember it that afternoon. A long, bare, stately apartment with little islands of chairs and tables here and there on the polished floor. The walls had fluted columns of white

and gold. The ceiling and the square panels of the walls were ornamented with a florid stucco work of lavish detail, and very handsome. One or two girandoles were the only relief to this ornamentation. The mantel-piece, inlaid with coloured marbles, had above it a Florentine Madonna brought home from his travels by Joscelyn Burke, who had made the grand tour with the great Earl of Charlemont.

The day was moist and cloudy, and Nuala had had the thought to light a fire, so that the room was full of warm firelight and cloud shadows, and the smell of the overblown roses, and the damp delicious air from the drenched lawns outside.

I thought it a proper setting for mother in her gray gown and white fichu, and the tiny circle of lace on her hair that gave her the matronly air she else had lacked, being so slight and so simple looking. She really looked very little older than Elizabeth with her imperious face and bearing. Elizabeth and I had set ourselves to look staid, and had put on frocks of blue serge with puritanical frilling at the neck and wrists.

Now the great ordeal was in meeting the new-comers. We had not to fear lest everything should not be in proper trim for them. All that was in Nuala's hands, and Nuala might be trusted. Of course there were many things lacking in the house that would have been found in a hotel, but then, as mother said, gentlefolk

were not so particular about things as the ordinary tourist, and as long as there was perfect cleanliness and good cooking they would be satisfied.

General Benyon and Mr. Richard Benyon—these were to be our first guests, and they were nearly due, for Lanty, very smart in new garments, had gone to fetch them nearly two hours ago.

At last we heard the sound of wheels. The moment had come, and mother, with a half-nervous movement, as though she would put her hand to her heart, stood up for one instant and sat down again.

There was a sudden angry voice in the hall, where Nuala was waiting to receive the new-comers.

“What the—ahem, deuce do you mean,” it said, “by sending such an abominable vehicle to meet us? I’ve had such a shaking up that I’m safe for an attack of liver, perhaps gout—gout, ma’am, do you hear me. Upon my word, I don’t know why I ever was enticed into your ridiculous country.”

We heard Nuala’s voice in answer, unexpectedly peaceful. Mother had risen from her chair with what sounded like a cry of distress, and we both ran to her, for she had turned quite pale.

“He shall go,” said Elizabeth stormily, “if he isn’t a gentleman to understand how to behave in the house of gentlefolk.”

Then the door opened, and there came in a red-faced

old gentleman, with white bushy eyebrows and very bright eyes, leaning on the arm of a young gentleman, who looked at us with an expression half-comical, half-apologetic.

The old gentleman flashed a glance about him that seemed to take in the room. Then his eyes rested on mother, who stood by her chair looking yet much distressed and disturbed, so that she could hardly stammer out a form of greeting.

He pulled up short, and stared at her. Then he relinquished his companion's arm, and stood straight as a ramrod. With a fine courtly air he took off his hat and bowed very low.

"Ma'am," he said, "forgive me. I am a peppery old fellow, and am troubled with a liver since I served in the East. But I am not intentionally rude. I had not indeed realized that you and these young ladies were within hearing."

"Sir," said our mother, "I quite understand. Our vehicles to those not accustomed to them are, I believe, not quite easy. I am sorry you were incommoded."

"Incommoded, ma'am?" said the old gentleman, with his eyes twinkling. "If to be flung like a sack of potatoes from one side to another is to be incommoded, then I have been. I have made some of the worst passages possible by sea in all parts of the world, but I assure you the worst was a flea-bite to your covered car."

"I am so sorry," began mother.

"Don't mention it," said the old gentleman. "It was worth while—wasn't it, Dick, you rascal?—for the sake of so much beauty."

He twinkled all over as he said it, so that a hitherto unsuspected likeness between uncle and nephew suddenly appeared and vanished again.

"It was worth while, sir," said the young gentleman.

"This is considered a very beautiful part."

"It was a revelation to me, I assure you, ma'am. But I beg your pardon. Allow me to introduce myself and my nephew. General Benyon, late of the —th Lancers. Mr. Richard Benyon."

"I'm glad to have the pleasure of meeting you, sir," said mother, ignoring all that had gone before.

"And the young ladies?" said the old soldier.

"My daughters—General Benyon—Mr. Richard Benyon. You will like to go to your rooms before tea?"

"If you please, ma'am; we are sadly in want of a brush-up. A pair of very untidy fellows, I'm afraid, for a lady's drawing-room."

I had been thinking the old gentleman, in his light gray suit, amazingly spick-and-span after so tiresome a journey.

When they had been shown to their rooms, mother rang the bell for tea. Then she looked at us with a smile of relief.



M630

“‘ALLOW ME TO INTRODUCE MYSELF AND MY NEPHEW’”



"They seem very pleasant," she said.

"I knew they would be," said Elizabeth, with her irresistible air of confidence. Yet I think there had been a moment when Elizabeth had trembled for the success of her scheme.

"That first moment was horrible," said I; "but General Benyon's bark is apparently worse than his bite."

"Old gentlemen are very often choleric," said mother, quite forgetting that it was she whom the loud voice had frightened. "You must not be misled by trifles like that, Joan, now that by our own choice we are brought into contact with the world."

"If it had been as we thought at first he would have—gone," said Elizabeth magnificently.

"Oh, my dear," said mother with a smile, "you will not be allowed to do business on those terms."

"Motherkin!" cried Elizabeth delightedly; "you are becoming a woman of business."

"It is lucky it turned out so well," I observed.

Just then the two gentlemen returned, and I thought I saw something of surprise and pleasure in their faces as they came in upon us and our tea-table.

I stood a little apart so that I could see how charming a picture mother made as she sat intent on her tea-making, her hands, with their old-fashioned rings, moving

about delicately over the Worcester china, which is one of the treasures of her china-closet.

General Benyon took the easy-chair by the fire, to which mother directed him by a wave of her hand, but his nephew went and stood by the tea-table, ready to hand the tea as soon as she had poured it.

I caught a gratified look upon Elizabeth's face. So far, indeed, the experiment seemed to be turning out well; but I hoped Elizabeth would not be too sanguine, seeing that we had but taken the first steps in our enterprise.

Presently Mr. Richard Benyon brought me my tea, and when I had taken it from him stood by me looking down upon me, and talking while he drank his own.

"The place is very beautiful," he said, looking from the room to the expanse of water and woodland and mountain that rolled away almost, it seemed, from our feet, into the distance, till it disappeared in a shining summer haze, half-rain, half-sun.

"We think it so," I said. "Of course we have not been much about the world."

"The world has nothing better," he said emphatically. "You have not travelled, then, Miss Franklin?"

I started at the strange name, seeming to recognize all at once how impracticable was this plan of Elizabeth's of giving us one name for our friends and another for such chance acquaintances. How would it be if some of the guests should presently become friends?

"I have been no further than France," I said, "and only to school there, and we have sometimes gone to Dublin to stay a while with friends of mother's."

"You would like to travel?"

"If we could afford it."

"If you cannot, it is well your lot is cast in so beautiful a place. You don't find it dull? You have friends here, of course, in plenty?"

"Some. They are rather scattered, and the distances are too great for us to see them often. We have two or three pretty close, fortunately."

"I don't know how young ladies feel in such circumstances. Of course a man would never be dull here. There must be all sorts of sport; and the hunting is good?"

"The Blazers would be bad to beat," I said, with a local pride in our famous pack.

"Do you ride to hounds?"

"We don't keep horses now. Of course we can all ride. We had our little ponies when we were children. Mother drives a pair of them now in her little phaeton. But we have not been promoted to horses. You see, the Land League—made all the difference to us."

"I see." Then after a pause. "Are you very sorry, Miss Franklin?"

"For what?"

"That the League made a difference?"

"Why, of course I am sorry. What else would you suppose?"

"I don't know: perhaps that you might be glad of the opportunity of doing good to others by admitting them to this paradise. No? Well, I suppose it's not to be expected really. We must be horrid bores to you, Miss Franklin. I feel abjectly apologetic for being here."

"Please don't," I implored. "I fear I must have seemed rude. I didn't mean to be."

"Then we aren't bores?"

"I should hardly tell you if you were, should I?"

"I should know it, perhaps."

"Besides, it wouldn't be business," I said, with a slight feeling of confusion, caused perhaps by the laughter in his eyes.

"Oh, if you put it that way! Are you very business-like, Miss—Joan?"

"My sister and I inherit a business faculty which came into our family in the last generation," I said sedately.

"And you are proud of it?"

"Very."

"What do you do with it?"

"Well, this—scheme—is a proof of my sister's possessing it. I follow in a humbler fashion. I am trying to run a little poultry farm. Presently I hope I shall be able to supply this place with fowl and eggs. Then I

have pigeons and rabbits. I started keeping goats, too; goat's milk is delicious in tea. But they tore up so many things, and then they always went dry as soon as I got them. So as mother was distressed at the idea of giving up her little Kerries—she has a pair of them, and they are beautiful milkers—I abandoned the goats. However, I hope to have a dairy of Kerries presently, and to have enough milk and butter for the house. Then there is the garden.”

“Ah, the garden,” he said, as I paused for breath. “What industry, Miss Joan! I have never heard of a young lady having so much in hand.”

“Joan,” said mother, calling me to her side. I felt myself blush as I went. Perhaps I had been talking too freely to this stranger. But if mother thought so, no rebuke was implied in her glance. She only wanted me to tell General Benyon about the places where the trout lay thickest.

It was impossible to realize, sitting there talking over our tea, that these were anything but ordinary visitors paying an afternoon call. Indeed, there was so pleasant a feeling of sociability about it that when Bet had taken up my tale about the trout and salmon I sat silent, thinking that these visitors, at all events, seemed likely to be an acquisition. We had been rather starved for society, to be sure. However, I would not make up my mind too rashly. Perhaps, I said, arguing

against myself, we should not like these people at all when we came to know them better, though it was an unlikely thing, for uncle and nephew seemed so very pleasant. The choleric old gentleman was listening to mother like a courtier, and the young gentleman was as deferential, besides having a very bright and sunny face.

At dinner General Benyon took a great fancy to Delia, who came gliding into her seat at mother's elbow. We had decided that for the present, at all events, we must all dine together. There were too few of us to make a second dinner desirable. Later on, when the house became more public, as, alas, it must if our scheme were to succeed, some of us might dine in the privacy of the west wing.

The old soldier seemed to think Delia quite a child, petting her and helping her to sweet things and fruit with apparently great pleasure to himself. And Delia, who is the shyest of the shy, became very friendly with her new acquaintance, and told him about our little dog that died, her doves, and the books she liked best, and the poetry she was reading, till we all looked at each other in wonder. But it was as pretty and innocent as a child's chatter; and I think we were all pleased to see Delia come out of her shell.

After all Margaret Synnott's society was not the most livening the child could possess.

We talked over our dinner as though we had known

each other for years, and we were very much entertained by Mr. Richard Benyon's account of the adventures of himself and his uncle at some of the little hotels in out-of-the-way places of our country.

"The rascals," said the general hotly, "would never answer your bell, though you pulled the cord down, and afterwards you would discover that there was no communication at all between the bell-rope and the bell. It ruined my temper; I assure you it did, ma'am"—to mother. "That is why I cut so confounded—I beg your pardon, ma'am!—so poor a figure before you when I arrived this afternoon, swaggering and—and blustering about the house as if I owned it, and—and there wasn't a lady within a thousand miles."

Mother bowed graciously. She has such beautiful manners; I always think that it seems a thousand pities she has had to keep them for so few people.

"Your annoyance was very natural, sir," she said.

"I don't agree with you, ma'am," he cried out quite angrily; but the anger was directed against himself. "I was a rude, fussy, domineering old bear. It would have served me right if you'd shown me the door."

Mother murmured something behind her dainty film of pocket-handkerchief.

"Yes it would, ma'am—it would; and then I'd never have had the pleasure of meeting little Cloudy-Locks here, nor yourself, ma'am, nor these young ladies. You

must keep me in better order, Dick, or you'll have me going off in a fit of apoplexy one of these days. Do you hear me, sir? It would have served me quite right if I had had to go off to that noisy abomination at the other end of the lake."

"I am glad you hadn't," said Elizabeth frankly.

"Oh, you are, are you?" he answered, beaming at her. "So am I—very glad indeed. Your trout, ma'am, is delicious; and these young, white fowl of yours a treat. I am very glad indeed I'm not being fed by a confounded—I mean a ridiculous French cook. To say nothing at all of the charming society."

And with this he bowed all around the table.

CHAPTER V.

POOR MARGARET.

A COUPLE of days later Mr. Thorneycroft came; then Miss Trescott. We were filling up by degrees.

Mr. Thorneycroft was a little, slender man, with a round, boyish face and a shrinking manner, who gave us the impression of being about twenty years of age, though he was really thirty.

He was a devoted fisherman, and was out with his rod and line all day. Sometimes he made excursions to distant places in pursuit of his favourite sport; once to

Galway town, where he saw the salmon come up under the bridge of the Corrib, leaping from the water, and returned much impressed by the sight. But usually he found what sport he wanted in the lake or in the Dan, which followed a winding course through our beautiful, unprofitable estate.

Mr. Thorneycroft hardly ever spoke to anyone without being spoken to. For myself, I liked his gentle face and the quiet, contemplative eyes. I noticed that, though he did not talk, he seemed always ready to oblige people in little ways, such as sitting up till midnight, playing whist with three very quarrelsome and uninteresting old ladies, while his eyes were full of sleep and he had given orders to be called at cock-crow next morning that he might fish a stream high up on Muckanish. He would even give up his fishing to make one of a picnic party, or some other function one was sure he hated, and where, though present in the body, he was certainly absent in the spirit. There were a hundred such little ways in which he sacrificed himself to please others. This, of course, was later, when the house had a good many other guests, about whom I do not propose to talk, but only about those who really played something of a part in our affairs.

Miss Trescott was another of our visitors who interested us. She was a maiden lady somewhere in the forties, and very pleasant-looking, with bright gray eyes

behind large glasses, an abundance of wavy brown hair, and a tight humorous mouth over even white teeth.

She was a good deal of a sportswoman, and a great walker. She introduced golf to our visitors, and she too, like Mr. Thorneycroft, had a taste for fishing, which made a common bond between them. She used to dress for her excursions in a neat, short, tailor-made dress of gray cloth, beautifully cut. When mother first saw Miss Trescott sally forth with her fishing-basket strapped upon her shoulders, I think she was alarmed.

"You—shoot, perhaps," I heard her say, with a nervous inflection of horror in her voice.

"No, then," Miss Trescott replied; "I'd like to do it, but I couldn't bear it. I went out with the guns once or twice, but I may tell you, my dear, that the sight of a dying partridge turning its eyes up turned me. I'm squeamish about the fish even; I don't like to see the hook in the creature's gills. But there; there's no sport without hurting something. I draw the line at fish. I once heard a hurt hare cry out. Ugh!"

However Miss Trescott felt about animals, she was very kind to human beings. We became such friends that presently, when the place was rather full, and we retired more and more to the west wing, we made her free of it. It was there she encountered Margaret Synnott, and laid hold on her, very much against poor Margaret's will.

"I can't bear," she said to mother one day, "to think there's any creature in the world so cowed-looking as that poor little Miss Synnott. Who's been frightening her, my dear?"

It was a way of Miss Trescott's to call all the world she liked "my dear".

Mother hesitated. She has a fine delicate sense of honour, and I guessed that she did not care for discussing Margaret's affairs, even with one we liked so much as Miss Trescott.

"There, my dear, tell me all about it. I know *you* didn't frighten her. Besides, it is some intimate tyranny—I can see that—that has been a bogey to her for years. Who is it, my dear? What is it? For I know that things can be tyrants as well as persons."

"I know you are kind," began mother.

"I tell you I can't stand it, Mrs. Franklin." Miss Trescott by this time knew mother's real name, but, as she said, she had grown used to the other. "I can't stand it, Mrs. Franklin. She looks like the shot partridge I told you about. I'm a rich woman—can't I help? Money will sometimes, you know."

"Not while Mrs. Synnott lives," said mother, shaking her head sadly.

"It is the poor thing's—"

"Mother. Yes, it is her mother. There are women like that. We are not all—pelicans. Tell Miss Tres-

cott about it, Joan; you know the facts as well as I do."

"Her mother is her tyrant, Miss Trescott. She has always been so, from the time Margaret was a little child. All the country knows it, except—perhaps Margaret. That is to say, Margaret knows her unhappiness is her mother's doing, but she does not realize what a remorseless tyrant the old woman is. Her submission, her dutifulness, might melt a heart of stone. It has not melted Mrs. Synnott's."

"It has nearly melted the girl herself. She looks spectre-like. What does this implacable person do? ill-treat her?"

"I don't know that she does that, in the vulgar sense. She is an awful old woman. You would have to know her. Her will has swept everything before it all her life. She wanted a boy, not Margaret. Margaret grew up in the shadow of her mother's resentment. After a very unhappy childhood she met someone who wanted to marry her. Mrs. Synnott did not choose that it should be so. There was nothing against him. He did not reach to the altitude of Mrs. Synnott's station in Mrs. Synnott's mind, or he had not first consulted the mother, or something. Anyhow, Mrs. Synnott let the affair go on to a certain length, long enough for Margaret to feel for the first time in her life the warmth of being loved. Then she put her foot on it, and crushed it for ever."

"What was the man about?"

"He was young. He could not understand his sudden dismissal. Margaret had written at her mother's dictation, too stunned, they say, to know how much the words involved. He had no idea of what Mrs. Synnott was like. We have heard she could be pleasant when she chose. He sought an interview with Margaret, and was met by Margaret's mother. Who can say what was suggested or stated?"

"Joan, my dear, we must not impute false dealing," said mother at my elbow.

"Anyhow, he flung off with himself, and Margaret has never heard of him since. It meant the riveting a hundredfold of her mother's yoke upon her. It would seem that, in obeying her in this supreme matter, Margaret's spirit had broken for ever, for since she has been a reed in Mrs. Synnott's hands. She has lost the power to choose for herself. Her mother has never loved her, and has all her life deprived her of all she hoped for or cared for."

"An unnatural mother is a terrible thing," sighed mother as I came to this part of the narrative, "and I am afraid Mrs. Synnott has been that."

"Can no one deliver her?"

"No one can—against her will. She would not know now perhaps how to stand upright without the support of her chain."

"Where is this Gorgon?"

"They live some miles from here, where the Dan widens to the sea. It is a very mournful-looking place, quite away from any neighbours, and standing on a spit of land which divides the river in two. It cannot be healthy to be in the midst of salt marshes like that."

"I suppose not. Your poor Margaret does not look a thriving specimen. But was nothing ever heard of the man?"

"Nothing."

"He was a faint-heart, or he was a poor lover."

"He did not look either," said mother. "I remember to have seen them together. He had a strand of white hair growing at his temple, though he was quite young, and the rest of his hair was brown."

"Ah!" said Miss Trescott, with illumination gradually overspreading her face. "Was his name, by any chance, Patrick Stewart?"

"I think his name was Stewart."

"That explains the intangible association I had with that poor thing's face. I met her lover one year at Marienbad. He was a bit dyspeptic and irritable, rather given to railing against women. One day, when he had been arguing the point, I maintaining that women were steadfast as often as men, he suddenly produced a pocket-case, and selecting a photograph from its contents, flung it at me. 'There,' he said, 'she looks as innocent as—as Heaven, doesn't she? You wouldn't think her capable of

winning a man's heart only to fling it back to him with contempt?' 'I certainly should not,' I said. 'Well,' he said, 'she did.' And then replacing the photograph, he walked away moodily from me. It was the only time I found him in a confidential humour."

"How strange," said mother, "if it was really Margaret's lover!"

"It was. The photograph was Miss Synnott's, though much younger."

"It was twelve or fourteen years ago."

"Her face has baffled me since I saw her by its likeness to some face I had seen. You have helped me to pick up the clue. But, my friend Patrick Stewart, I have less respect for your good sense!"

"He was right in his first thought of poor Margaret. She is innocent, a martyr to duty. She will earn a rich reward," said mother, with a sigh.

"I don't agree with you, my dear," said Miss Trescott a little snappishly.

Mother looked at her in mild wonder.

"You are a saint, my dear; but one may be a saint one's self and afford others the opportunity of being—something else. The slave makes the tyrant. Perhaps your poor Margaret's mother might conceivably learn better things if the girl stood up for her rights."

"Poor Margaret, she never would. And poor Mrs. Synnott too; she has had a good deal to embitter her."

"For example?"

"Her poverty. Her rents have disappeared as ours have. Alas! that those who loved us could not have foreseen that the stable land would be the most unstable of all securities!"

"It didn't make you bitter," said Miss Trescott.

"I am different, to begin with. God helped me. It is His mercy that I am not proud and angry, like Mrs. Synnott."

"You visit her?"

"No one visits her. She lives shut up in her house. She has no servants. A deaf and dumb woman does her work. She is alone all day while Margaret is here."

"What does she do?"

"She is an invalid. I think the trouble has made her ill."

"I wonder she lets the girl come to you."

"I think Margaret wonders too," I put in.

"I'm afraid they are very, very poor," said mother, with grieved compassion. "We give Margaret so very little for being with Delia and helping her with her lessons, but she will not take more. I am afraid, I am often afraid, that if Margaret did not come here they would really have very little to eat. There, I oughtn't to have said that, perhaps. It is a dreadful secret to tell about gentlefolk. But I am really afraid it is true."

"The dreadful thing is not its being told, but that it

should be so. I've lots of money. It keeps growing in the night when I'm asleep. If it would only keep quiet! I do what I can, and then I'm told I'm pauperizing. Can't I help here where there is no fear of such a thing?"

"Oh, my dear," cried mother, "Mrs. Synnott would—I don't know what she would do if she heard a whisper of such a thing! There are lots of people who would help—for poor Tom Synnott's sake,—though there's little money going. Mrs. Synnott would die first."

"Or make her daughter die. If she wants help and won't take it she ought to be put into a lunatic asylum. There are certain matters in which we come back to the bed-rock of the natural law. Everyone has a right to food, clothing, a bed, and shelter. If they haven't these things, and their neighbour has them to spare, nothing should stand between."

"Isn't that rather socialistic?" asked mother timidly.

"True socialism, my dear, and, though you won't believe it, true religion as well. But I'm going to do something for that girl, if I die for it. When the mother fails one, it is the last blow on earth. We have all a right to that soft bosom to creep into. I've had it myself in common with most creatures. I've known what it was to shelter in that boundless compassion. If, once in a blue moon, a poor creature is born of a cruel mother, I think the whole happy world owes it reparation."

"I never slept a night away from my little ones," said mother. "I was always stealing up the nursery stairs at night to see if they slept warm, or were cool enough. I made mistakes, but I was always thinking for them."

"Of course you were. They are a credit to you. But this poor thing."

"What would you do for her?"

"I should like to give a bit of my mind to my friend, Patrick Stewart."

"Would that help?"

"It might; but I don't know where he is."

"They would both be so much changed. It is many years ago. They would be strangers."

"I would risk it if I could bring them together. Besides, I'd like to confute the man, to say, 'You block-head, the girl was true to you all the time; but being a man, you let yourself be hoodwinked, and the girl's heart broken.' I should like to see my friend's face then."

"He was fond of her," said mother.

"So he was. And, perhaps, I shouldn't like to see his face after all. Perhaps I should never think of making that speech to him. Perhaps—but it's five years since I met him, and he's lost as completely to me, if he is yet in this world, as though the sea had closed over him. But I want to befriend that poor thing who can only know what a real mother is from seeing other people's."

"You can't help her—not while her mother's alive," I said.

"You don't want me to murder her, Joan, my dearie?"

"Heaven forbid, Miss Trescott!"

"Then we'll have to find some other way of doing it."

CHAPTER VI.

LOVE AT FIRST SIGHT.

IT was not my fault that I overheard a scrap of conversation between mother and Mrs. Langrishe which was never meant for my ears.

I think they had forgotten I was there, snipping and watering in the tiny conservatory off mother's boudoir. I had spoken to Mrs. Langrishe as I passed through, so it must have been that they had forgotten. And for a while I did not think that I ought not to listen, for it was unexpectedly that the conversation took a confidential turn, and out there in the conservatory I really seemed to be part of it.

"I am going to bring Kinvarra on Wednesday," said Mrs. Langrishe.

"What is he like?" asked mother, with interest. "I remember poor Lady Kinvarra before the fall that crippled and finally killed her. She was a lovely woman."

"It was being so much in the sick-room gave the boy his solitary disposition. He adored his mother. You knew his father. What a pleasant, handsome fellow he was! though he wasn't one of the very few men in the world who will be chained to a sick wife."

"It was a sad upbringing for a child."

"It made Kinvarra serious. It has hardly made him sad."

"His outdoor life and his love of adventure would save him from sadness, I suppose."

"You are right. He has, on the contrary, a quiet cheerfulness of his own. But he is solitary, of course. Even in his adventures he has been solitary, or with taciturn aborigines, scarcely more talkative than his dogs and horses. He has brought back many trophies."

"He is heart-whole, still?"

"I believe I occupy the only bit of his heart in which his mother is not enthroned."

"You were good to the lonely boy, Ellen."

"I was glad to have him to care for. It was an insight into the motherhood which the Will had denied me."

"I hope he will marry. A good son makes a good husband."

"If anyone but you had said that, Nora, I should have thought we were approaching confidences."

"Confidences, Ellen?"

"Yes, dear Nora. I am a little bit like Kinvarra's mother, and I have a right to plan for him. I wish he would marry one of your girls."

"They are not thinking of marriage Ellen."

"But they will think of it."

"There is plenty of time."

"For them, not for us—for me, I mean. I want to have a long spell of happiness looking on at my children's."

"Ah, Ellen, we can't force these things."

"Of course not. But given a young man like Kinvarra, whose heart is virgin soil, and a girl like Betty, love might well come naturally."

"You are match-making for Elizabeth, then?"

"Yes, she would reign royally at Kinvarra Castle. She is my god-daughter too. I love her best after Kinvarra."

"Don't let her know you have been planning for her."

"She would not like it?"

"It would drive her the opposite way. Ah, Ellen, we must leave these things in the hands of God. We cannot make our children's lives as we would."

"There I disagree with you. He gives us so much of the shaping to do. If it were not so, would fathers and mothers be held responsible?"

"We have them in our hands when they are little ones. Then we almost stand to them in the place of

God. When they have grown, there are things we cannot do for them."

"I suppose you are right. Still, we must have our preferences for them."

"They must be silent ones, then."

"Oh, I sha'n't come as a match-maker. Kinvarra will do his own wooing. I have told him about you all, about Betty most of all. He is curious; it is as far as we can go."

"Ah, well, I am glad you are not coming match-making. Betty is not Celt enough to take to it kindly."

When they had got so far I went out, having finished the watering I had come to do.

I could have told mother that the Celt did not always take kindly to the match-making, for there was little Kitty, Nuala's young distant cousin, breaking her heart because her father wanted to make her match with old O'Keeffe, the village shopkeeper, while her sweetheart was away in America, striving, against many misfortunes, to earn the money that should give him the right to save her.

I was so interested in Kitty's trouble—Nuala was sheltering her under her wing from the father's anger—that it put Mrs. Langrishe's match-making out of my head.

I had quite forgotten when on the Wednesday I came to tea in the garden, bringing Mr. Thorneycroft with me. I had met him as I came back from the post,

he carrying a goodly basket of trout, which he immediately laid at my feet. He had taken to presenting us with so much fish lately that our fishmonger's bill perceptibly dwindled.

"Why don't you leave them where they are, Mr. Thorneycroft," I asked, "if you only catch them to give them away?"

"Ah! there spoke the non-fisher, Miss Joan," he said with his placid smile. "You see the pleasure is in catching them."

"I'm sure Izaak Walton enjoyed eating them, with a syllabub to follow, and so did his friend—what's his name?—the judicious Hooker, was it?"

"Ah, Miss Joan, you Irish are so witty," cried he, delighted at my little angling joke. Then he added sedately: "I always think you are like the milkmaid in *The Complete Angler*."

"Mr. Thorneycroft!" I cried, raising a warning finger.

"Or like Sir Thomas Overbury's *Fair and Happy Milkmaid*," he went on, with his ingenuous smile. "Do you know it, Miss Joan? It is so delicious. 'The garden and bee-hive are all her physic and chirurgery, and all her care is that she may die in the spring-time to have a store of flowers stuck upon her winding-sheet.'"

"Mr. Thorneycroft, you are paying compliments," I said severely. We had all learned to treat him as if he were a child, or a very nice old gentleman.

"I didn't mean to, indeed, Miss Joan," he said humbly. "I was thinking of you in your garden there."

"Well, come with me and you shall ask mother to accept your basket, and she will give you some tea in return. But you ought to send trout to your friends, Mr. Thorneycroft. That is what anglers always do. That's what you must do in future."

"I shall try to, Miss Joan. It's awfully good of you to ask me to tea."

So when I brought Mr. Thorneycroft down the cool corridor of the west wing, into which the leaves over the windows admit a light faintly green, to the garden, I found Mrs. Langrishe and a gentleman.

"My daughter, Lord Kinvarra," said mother, introducing us.

The tall, brown-faced visitor stood up and shook hands with me, with a quiet cordiality miles removed from the society manner. Then he retired to his chair, which I noticed stood a little outside the circle.

When mother had welcomed Mr. Thorneycroft he too took a somewhat distant chair, and was about apparently to relapse into his usual state of silence, when Lord Kinvarra asked him a question about the fishing.

In a minute they were at it, hammer-and-tongs. I wondered at Mr. Thorneycroft's expansiveness, but whenever it seemed likely to cease, a question from Lord Kinvarra brought it on again.

I am the silent one of the family, as perhaps I have made manifest before now. I suppose it is because my tasks have not been of the gregarious kind. I have always liked the outdoor life, what Betty calls contemptuously "pottering", rather than those fireside pursuits over which women forgather and talk.

I was amused to see how talkative Mr. Thorneycroft became in presence of a sympathetic listener. Lord Kinvarra's excursions into the conversation were monosyllabic; but it was easy to see that he was interested in his companion. They were talking sport, sport, sport, and I was surprised to learn from the scraps of conversation that came my way how much Mr. Thorneycroft had done in the way of killing big game. We had always thought that fishing seemed just the one kind of sport for which he was fitted.

Betty and her godmother were in conversation over the tea-cups, while mother sat by smiling quietly while she knitted.

Mrs. Langrishe loved to draw out Betty's bright and agile mind, and at this moment she had, perhaps, an unusual reason for wishing her favourite to show to the utmost advantage. I had a fancy that Betty's bright sallies flashed in the air much as did mother's knitting needles in the golden afternoon sun. Betty was quite unconscious, but I think Lord Kinvarra noticed, for he looked at her now and again and smiled; and I think

Mrs. Langrishe knew that he was not lost to the rest of the world in Mr. Thorneycroft's conversation, much as he seemed to like it.

I was just saying to myself that we should probably like Lord Kinvarra very much—he had an odd look of shyness and spirit, like a racer, that rather fascinated me, —when Delia came into the garden. Her air of alarm at the presence of visitors was unmistakable, as she stole into a chair by mother's elbow, and withdrew herself into the shadow as much as possible.

I was thinking what a baby she looked in her washed-out lilac muslin, and her demure attitude, when I saw Lord Kinvarra staring at her like a man who has seen a vision.

Then he suddenly crossed over, and took the chair at mother's right hand.

"You have not introduced me," he said, with his eyes on Delia's face.

"My youngest daughter, Delia," mother said.

Lord Kinvarra fell quite silent, but he watched Delia with that shy yet definite sideway glance. As for the child she never looked his way, but after a glance this way and that way, as though she would flee, she sat there drooping, and with a faint flash of colour coming and going in her cheeks.

I saw Mrs. Langrishe lift her eyebrows with an amusement that was half chagrin. She too, then, saw the little



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"LORD KINVARRA GOING BEFORE HER TO OPEN THE
LITTLE WICKET"



comedy in which she was to some extent an actor. Betty meanwhile flashed and glittered, not seeming to have noticed anything. It was well that she was indifferent, for it was plain enough that our little sister filled the eyes of this interesting young man to our exclusion.

Presently Delia went back to Margaret Synnott, who would rarely consent to appear with her when we had visitors. I felt that she went with relief, for by that time the wavering spot of colour in her cheeks had grown fixed, and she glowed in an exotic beauty which we had never suspected to be possible in her.

When she had gone, Lord Kinvarra going before her to open the little wicket of the garden that she might pass through, he came back, and took up the conversation with Mr. Thorneycroft as though it had never been interrupted. Presently Betty was called away, and the two men, with masculine restlessness, began walking up and down the garden.

"What do you think of him?" Mrs. Langrishe asked mother.

"Of Lord Kinvarra? I like his looks; but he is very silent, isn't he?"

"He has eloquent eyes."

"I don't think I noticed them, Ellen," said mother, placidly taking up a dropped stitch. "He seems to like Mr. Thorneycroft."

"He seems to like other people too."

"Does he? I thought it kind of him to sit by me. But I don't think he said anything much that I remember."

"He has the habit of taciturnity, as I warned you. But he can speak. I shouldn't be at all surprised if he were to surprise you with his eloquence one of these days."

"Indeed!" said mother, unsuspecting. "I suppose he has hardly found his tongue yet."

"I think he is in a fair way to find it."

"I suppose people who have been silent from necessity—for, of course, he could not speak to those Indians and people you tell me he has been so much with—talk a great deal when they break the habit of silence."

"I don't think Kinvarra will ever be a chatterbox."

"I thought you said he would."

"I meant that what he said, rather than the amount, might possibly surprise you."

"There, Ellen, clever people like you and my Betty rather bewilder me. But Lord Kinvarra seems very agreeable. I shouldn't mind if he talked a little more."

"I dare say you'll see a good deal of him in the future."

"I shall be very glad," said mother; "the poor young fellow must be lonely. I am glad he liked us. But"—she seemed to forget that I might overhear as she lowered her voice—"you see you were wrong about Elizabeth.

I don't think he spoke to her or she to him. You see, dear Ellen, it is no use trying to bring these things about."

"I acknowledge it," said Mrs. Langrishe with a resigned air. "I was quite wrong about Elizabeth."

"You must bring him one day that Georgie and Madge O'Hara are here. Lord Kinvarra is sure to be interesting to girls," said mother, with the air of having made a discovery, "he has had such an adventurous life."

"Upon my word, Nora," said Mrs. Langrishe comically, "I'm afraid I've played the county a rather shabby trick."

"How, Ellen?"

"I won't tell you how. Perhaps you'll find out for yourself one of these days."

CHAPTER VII.

THE GARDENER ADAM.

SO you are a gardener, Miss Joan?" said General Benyon to me one morning when I encountered him by accident as I was wearing my gardening gloves and hat.

"I should love to be one," I said, "but the gardens of this house are rather beyond me. I should not dare call myself a gardener."

"Ah! your humility is very becoming. One doesn't become a gardener in a day or a year. I have been at it

all my life, on and off, and I consider myself a tyro yet, a mere tyro, though my gardens at Hawk's Nest, my little place in Sussex, are a sight to see."

"How did you find time for it, general? You did so many other—fine things."

"Nothing at all to gardening, my dear, nothing at all. Not but what I liked the Service, and was proud of my men, and knew them and was sure of them. It isn't everyone can say as much. But they were good fellows, good fellows. However, about the gardening, my dear. That's the occupation for a man's latter days. There's nothing about it that's not innocent, clean, and wholesome. It's the occupation for a man who is doing what your excellent housekeeper calls 'making his soul'—the most suitable of occupations."

"I never thought of that."

"Of course you didn't. You're not at the age for it, my dear. It wouldn't be natural to think about such things at your age. But you'll remember one day perhaps what an old gardener told you—an old gardener and an old soldier—a soldier in his youth and manhood, a gardener in his age. I hope I do no discredit to either trade."

He lifted his hat with a reverential air as though he stood before an unseen tribunal, and I was not surprised, for he was not the first old soldier I had met who was very religious at heart.

"I am sure you do not," I said lamely.

"What do you know about it, Miss Joan?" he asked, and his eyes twinkled. "You are taking me on faith, hey? Well, we often have to do that with each other. But this garden of yours; won't you introduce me to it? Very unhandsome, I call it, hiding it away behind hedges of privet and holly and yew, thick as a stone wall."

"It belongs to the west wing, you see, general," I said apologetically, "and it was mere accident that we reserved the west wing for ourselves."

"It was only my jest, my dear. You are too good to us having us here at all. Horrible nuisances we must seem to you."

"We have had nothing but pleasant experiences, I am glad to say."

"I hope it may continue so, with all my heart. No furious old fellows arriving and making a row about their livers, hey?"

"I'm afraid our arrangements are rather primitive," I said, rather hoping for a denial.

"Not a doubt of it," said the old man, twinkling again. "But keep them so, my dear, keep them so. Then you'll only get folk like myself who appreciate their surroundings. That liver episode—now you'll forgive me, my dear? Would I ever have gone shouting and stamping about like that if I had realized where I was? Not a

bit of it, and I've been downright ashamed of it ever since."

"Forget about it, general, as we do."

"That rascal Dick won't let me. When I take a hand at whist with your mother of evenings I've seen that fellow look over, and I've read in his eye that he's reminding me of it. Laughing at me, he is. Dick doesn't know what a liver is yet. Neither do you, my dear."

"I can imagine it."

"With your face of roses and cream!—excuse me, my child, an old man can speak the truth even if it happens to be complimentary. But are you going to make me free of your garden?"

"Certainly," I said. "I am on my way there now. But I'm really ashamed that you should see it. I've only a couple of ragged small boys to help me; I've just managed to insense into them the difference between a weed and a flower."

"They'll do less harm, I swear, than half the trained gardeners going. I wonder what they're doing at Hawk's Nest now, by the way. When I must be away I just tell them to keep the place clean, nothing more. It was a long time before I could get a head-gardener to stay on those terms, that he was never to do anything without consulting me, except rake the gravel, and pull up the weeds, and water. I got one at last; I had to

pay him heavily for forgetting all the knowledge he had acquired."

"You might as well not have had him, then."

"I'd never have found it out only for Dick. Dick said the same thing to me. Then I discovered in the Strand one day, between a couple of sandwich-boards, one of my fellows, Rashleigh by name. He burst into tears when he saw me. The drink, my dear, destroys many a good soldier. He's given it up now. I made him my head-gardener. He stumps about all day seeing that the under-gardeners keep to their work. I believe he'd shoot one of them if he found him so much as potting a plant outside orders. That's discipline, my dear."

"I shouldn't have thought it!"

"No? Rashleigh's to be trusted to enforce orders, anyhow."

"It's lucky he's given up the drink."

"I'll tell you how he did it, my dear. The very day after I gave him the work—I did it on the strength of his word that he'd reform—I went round to his little cottage to see how he was getting on. I wish you could see that cottage now, my dear, all ship-shape, and the little garden brimming over with flowers. Well, as I came near I saw Rashleigh standing by his porch loading his musket with the most bloodthirsty expression on his face I've ever seen—and mind, I know what it

is to see men when they smell blood. 'By the Lord Harry,' says I, 'Rashleigh's mad! And it's your duty, so it is, Robert Benyon, to tackle him now you've brought him here.' So I stole up behind the fellow, and as soon as I was near enough, I dragged his two arms round and held him fast. 'You're mad and insubordinate, Rashleigh,' said I; 'and what's more, you're drunk. It's cells with you this time, my man.' 'Let me at him, general!' said he, panting, but quieter than I had hoped for. 'There's no one there, you unfortunate fellow,' said I. 'There's the enemy,' said he, 'and I'm neither mad nor drunk. Let me at him!' cried he again. Well, I looked where he was staring, and what do you think met my eye? Why, a big bottle of rum, my dear! So I laughed and let Rashleigh's arms free, and he blazed away at the bottle and left a dead man at the first shot. I believe the enemy *is* dead for him."

It may be supposed that I brought this notable gardener into my domain with some misgivings. However, he was very kind and very helpful. He patted Larry and Joe, my two small assistants, on their curly flaxen heads, and gave each of them a shilling to take home to their mothers, after treating them to a lecture on gardening which left them round-eyed, as much at their newly-discovered responsibilities as at the magnitude of the gifts that followed.

"Your rose-trees are growing wild," he said to me, pausing before a bush where the hundred-leaved rose had become a mere lovely cup of half a dozen leaves. "You must put a graft on to them."

"I have tried grafting," I said meekly, "but the results have not been very successful."

"You haven't done it properly," he said energetically. "You want new blood. Let me see: this is Tuesday. I can do some grafting for you to-morrow morning. Now, don't say you've anything else to do. Gardening takes an undivided heart."

"I have nothing else to do. And I am very much obliged to you for your offer."

"We belong to the royal craft of gardening, my child. That is your claim on me, apart from the fact that you are a very charming young lady, and I am as susceptible as men of my cloth usually are."

At this he laughed so much that I felt the contagion of it, and laughed heartily with him.

"Everywhere I have gone, my dear Miss Joan, from Lagos to Gibraltar, from Secunderabad to Quebec, I have kept my garden. Little gardens, and perishable they often were, and I was sometimes on the march again before I could see my seeds spring up. But it is surprising what a comfort it has been to me on the whole. When a certain—human hope failed me, the mercy of God met me in my garden. Oh, the garden has

lessons, my dear, as you'll find presently! 'Books in the running brooks, sermons in stones', and eternal wisdom in flowers, my dear. The tree of knowledge—of good—springs yet in the garden. You see there how God accomplishes His promises. Nothing dies, and the terror of the grave is vanquished. There is the tender mercy of the dews, and the rain is fruitful."

He broke off with a sudden boyish shyness and looked at me deprecatingly.

"Am I a long-winded, dull old fellow, Miss Joan?" he asked.

"You are nothing of the sort, General Benyon," I answered.

"If I am not, my dear, it is because it is your sweetness makes you patient with an old man."

He patted my hand very softly while I assured him of what was really true, that it had given me pleasure to listen.

"I'll tell you one thing, my dear," he said, after a few minutes. "Now this is a matter of practical advice. Don't let that fellow Dick into your garden."

"But he doesn't want to come."

"He may want to. Don't you let him. When that boy was five years of age he broke my Brazilian cat's-eye orchid. It nearly cost me my life, I assure you, my dear. Luckily it was after my conversion, so I kept my anger in check, or I'd have had a seizure. I took it as a

visitation, and forgave Dick. But I never let him into my houses, my dear. Whatever pretext he comes on, I never let him into my houses. He's a dear, good child, a dear good boy, is Dick, but a fool in a garden."

"He couldn't do much harm in mine," I said, looking around me ruefully.

"I'd rather see a bull in mine than Dick any day. The boy's a comfort to me, but I never want to see him in my garden."

"I suppose your gardens are very beautiful," I said wistfully.

"Pretty good, my dear, pretty good."

"Tell me what they are like."

"You have never been in Sussex, I think?"

"I have only passed through England."

"Well, Hawk's Nest is a comfortable little English home in the midst of a country as unlike this as it is possible to imagine. There is a lake in front of the house, a little lake full of water-lilies, and it is only a bead in a string, for many such little lakes are set one after another in the midst of the woods. Our house—it is Dick's as well as mine—is of red brick, more than two hundred years old. The gardens are at the back, walled in with red brick. I'd warrant them to stand a siege, those walls. They are open to the south, sheltered on the north by the house, on the east by a copse where the nightingales build in spring.

I think I have heard you have no nightingales in Ireland, Miss Joan?"

"We have none. Your home sounds very pleasant."

"You needn't fret, child, so long as you have the blackbirds. The moist climate seems to suit their voices. Yes, Hawk's Nest is a kindly warm old house. Sussex is not a patch on this place for pure beauty, but our English country has an air of home. The place has been ours undisturbed for so long. We have no ghosts, no evil memories. Yes, Hawk's Nest is very pleasant. I'll tell you what, my dear."

"Yes, General Benyon?"

"It only lacks one thing."

"And that?"

"A mistress. There's my boy, Dick, a bachelor at twenty-eight. A dull fellow, I say to him, a dull fellow, or he'd have brought home his bride before now. I've said to him twenty times, if I've said it once, that he must bring home its mistress to Hawk's Nest. 'We're very well off with Braddy,' he says. That's only Dick dissembling, for I think he'd like to see a lady at the head of his table as much as I. Braddy is Mrs. Bradfield, the housekeeper, and Dick has always been the apple of her eye. 'Besides,' he says, 'we can get rid of Braddy if she doesn't suit us. We couldn't get rid of a wife.' 'Oho,' said I to him, 'get rid of Braddy, indeed! Braddy could get rid of us, but if we wanted

Braddy to go, and she wanted to stay, we'd have our work cut out for us. I'll tell you what,' said I to him, 'if you go on like this much longer I'll get a wife myself.' 'That's all right, then,' said he, the young dog; 'then I may consider myself free to lead the bachelor life. I'll look out for a suitable lady for you, uncle,' said he. But I'm tiring you, my dear. It's really too bad when I only came in for a few minutes to look at your garden."

"You are not really tiring me at all, General Benyon."

"That's because you're so kind-hearted, my dear. But I'm wasting time at all events. Let me come to your garden often, will you? And if I can help you at all, do let me. But above all things don't let Dick into your garden. He'll come asking you, probably. Dick is a fellow who rushes in where angels fear to tread. Your most cherished possession—I mean in the garden-ing way—wouldn't be safe if Dick was about. A good boy, but a clumsy. I have never been able to replace that Brazilian cat's-eye. Be very wary of Master Dick, my dear."

CHAPTER VIII.

A SON OF SAILORS.

MISS JOAN, has my uncle been warning you against me?"

"In what way, Mr. Benyon?"

"Why, telling you of my boyish iniquity with reference to his orchid."

"He did mention something of the kind."

"And that is why I am not admitted to your garden."

"Would you have been admitted otherwise, then?"

"I hope so. My uncle's jealous seclusion of his garden from me makes me greedy of other folks' gardens. I am a sort of *peri* without the gates."

"Poor Mr. Benyon! Is the garden, then, so utterly closed against you?"

"I can walk there; but my uncle watches me with an anxious scrutiny that effectually prevents my enjoying myself. I believe he thinks that if he moved his eye from me I should make a dart at his most precious flower and shatter it. He can't disassociate my grown years from my childish misdeeds."

"A childish accident."

"Miss Joan, let me unburden an oppressed conscience to you. It wasn't an accident, it was mischief."

"Mr. Benyon!"

"You may well look horrified. I have borne the knowledge of my crime all those years."

"But what possessed you to do it?"

"The same feeling that makes a child want to upset the ink-pot. Because there's such a rumpus about it."

"And did no one know you did it by design?"

"I locked the secret in my own guilty breast. Even

my faithful Braddy—you've heard of Braddy, Miss Joan,—who sat by me holding my hand till I had sobbed myself asleep, and who thought a deal too much fuss was made over 'that there ugly old flower'—even Braddy did not suspect me."

"You had the grace to repent, then, or was it that you were heavily punished?"

"It was pure repentance. It was the dear old boy's face upset me as he stood there holding the ruined orchid in a shaking hand. Was it very wrong of me not to confess that I did it with deliberate intent?"

"It would have hurt him worse to know it."

"He only thinks me the clumsiest fellow unhung now. If he knew that I took aim with a stone at his Brazilian cat's-eye, I think it would have broken his heart."

"Then I think the reservation of confession was justified."

"You take a weight from my mind. It is better that he should think my fingers all thumbs than that he should see me mentally the murderer of orchids, carrying a figurative pocket of stones and a sling, all the days of his life."

"It is better."

"And you will take me to see your garden?"

"It is really mother's garden. Her rooms look upon it."

"Mrs. Franklin has given me leave for her part. For the rest she referred me to you. I moved her kind heart by telling her of Uncle Bob's distrust of me."

"I dare say you imposed upon her."

"How could I, Miss Joan? Even you must pity me, a gardenless Adam—without an Eve too."

He tried to meet my eye, but I refused to look at him. Instead I said sedately that I had very little time for entertaining visitors in my garden. There was so much to do, and so little time and so few hands to do it.

"You let Uncle Bob in," he said with real or pretended pique.

"He comes to work. He is so good to me with his advice and assistance."

"And I should come to play?"

"I think it extremely likely. And you would expect other people to play too."

"I am always being misunderstood. You take me for the boy in the fable who wanted all the creatures to play with him; but they all had tiresome things to do, and were too selfish to give up their deadly doing in order to amuse the poor little beggar for a while. I have always thought it a cutting satire against the busy-bodies of the world."

"You misread it, I'm sure. But you are keeping me idle."

"Let me come with you, then."

"I have no time for idle fine gentlemen."

"Listen, Miss Joan, you do me a horrible injustice. I am not an idle fine gentleman, by choice."

He said it so seriously that I turned to look at him.

"There," he said, "you have looked at me at last. I have wanted so much to see your eyes open full upon me like that. They are flowers of wonder, Miss Joan."

I was vexed to find myself turning red.

"I thought you were serious," I said. "I have no time for nonsense. I have so much to do."

"Forgive me, Miss Joan," he said, turning and walking beside me. "I was serious, really and truly. Don't be vexed with me, and do let me walk with you."

"If you will; I am going to Mrs. Mulhern at the farm over yonder to see if she has any chickens fit to kill."

"I will carry the chickens," he said delightedly. "Have you a basket we could take along?"

"Go back and ask Nuala for one," I said, smiling. "Rose will find her for you."

By this time the visitors at Ardeelish had dwindled to a handful, but these seemed likely to stay a considerable time, and return again if we were minded to receive them. Our success with these few had suggested to Elizabeth a different plan for the future. We would receive only a limited number of guests. We had found, indeed, that while our arrangements seemed grotesquely inadequate to the many, the house, its ways and sur-

roundings, appealed very strongly to the few. Miss Trescott and Mr. Thorneycroft seemed as if they had settled down for life, and Miss Trescott, who was very popular in society, assured us that she could fill our rooms twice over if she liked.

"Only," she added, "upon my word, I don't want to. It's all very well for us, Thorneycroft and the general and myself and young Benyon, with the parson and the doctor to come in to make a table at whist or to make a golfing club worth while; but it would never do to bring in the world. You tried it, my dears, on a larger scale, and your arrangements have been found wanting."

"What's the matter with them?" Elizabeth had asked crestfallenly, for Elizabeth prided herself upon doing anything she took the trouble to do well.

"It's ridiculous, that's what it is," said Miss Trescott. "Now those old cats have gone to their Hydro—they must be different from other cats, by the way—we're just a happy family party. Little by little we've all invaded your west wing. Your servants are charming creatures, but they oblige us, they don't serve us. Your delightful Nuala wouldn't know how to take an order from any of us, though she makes us happy as your visitors. Where are your amusements, my dears? There are none. We amuse ourselves, and very jolly it is. Your inadequate boots takes away our foot-gear, it is true, every night, but forgets to restore it in the morning till we make

an expedition in search of it, and then he explains that he had to run five miles this morning after his mother's old goat, as if that were any excuse, and while he details the events of the search, he hands you smilingly everyone's boots but your own. It's an unspoilt paradise for us, but it isn't a business concern, and it's no use pretending it is."

"I'm afraid you're right," said Elizabeth. "You see, the trouble was that we had no money to start with. That is why the whole apparatus limps so."

"You never will have money, my dear, as you conduct it. In the first place, you don't charge us half enough; and in the second place, you don't put down our extras. You forget them."

"Are you sure of that, Miss Trescott? I keep the accounts myself."

"I should suppose as much. No one that ever undertook to do it for money could do it so badly."

"I had no idea it would be such little, mean work. Those extras, now. I am always feeling that I grudge you every bit you eat. I suppose I do forget the extras. I hate to remember them."

"You'll be shut up next year, that's what you'll be; and after spoiling me for all other hostelries on the terrestrial globe, you'll shut the door in my face. Heigh-ho! I suppose the pleasant things of this world are never on a business basis."

"We'll never shut the door on you, Miss Trescott. Shall we, Joan?"

"I should think not. As long as we can keep the roof of Ardeelish over us, we'll have a place for a friend."

"I dare say. It would be more in your line than taking people's money. That same roof won't be long over you, by the way, if you don't mend the holes in it."

We had grown used to Miss Trescott's sharp, pleasant ways, and knew better than to be offended. We were sure, too, that she would give us all the help in her power; and if there were four people quite satisfied with our primitive methods, there must be others who could be happy in the same circumstances. It was such reasoning that made Elizabeth laugh, and tell Miss Trescott that she must send us lots of people who would think like herself, or she would come one fine day to discover us all gone to America, and Ardeelish in ruins.

"More likely to find you all married," she said. "Upon my word, if your mother were another kind of woman, I'd say the paying guests was a clever match-making device. You should be plain and elderly, you hussies, for an undertaking like this."

However, I am leaving poor Mr. Dick Benyon toiling under the enormous market-basket with which Nuala had loaded him.

'Do I remind you of the ass and his panniers?" he said laughing, as he came running after me, with

half a dozen dogs yelping with delight about the two of us.

"How will you feel when it is filled?" said I, answering one question by another, after the manner of my country-people.

"Will it be worse then? It will be heavier, of course."

"The poor chickens will be fluttering up and down, and screeching horribly all the time."

"Never mind. It's a cheap price to pay for my walk. Besides, I don't want you to think of me as a very idle fellow."

He looked at me, serious for once, so that I was moved to apologize for my raillery of him.

"Of course you jested," he said. "You are far too sweet to have found out my raw spot and flicked me on it. There, don't look like that, or you'll make me say something foolish. The truth is, Miss Joan, that I wanted very, very much to be a sailor, and that I gave it up for my uncle's sake."

"He wanted you, of course?"

"He wouldn't, God bless him! if he knew I wanted otherwise; and especially if he knew my desire for the sailor's life. He thinks I never look beyond the life I lead, lounging about Hawk's Nest nine months of the year, and spending the other three at some seaside place, or somewhere abroad."

"What do you do with it—your life I mean?"

"Nothing of any importance to anyone. I hunt a couple of days a-week in winter, play a little footer and cricket, dance at a good many balls, shoot a certain number of birds, fish the Arun and the Stour; nothing more important than these things."

"Many country gentlemen lead such a life, and are satisfied with it."

"I'm a misfit, I suppose. I hear the big winds calling me through it all. But I shall never go. My father and grandfather were sailors, you know, Miss Joan."

"It is heroic of you to stay," I said, looking with sympathy at the cloud on the face that was usually so full of roguish laughter.

"I couldn't leave him alone, and take all the chances of the life."

"He never suspects it?"

"You will hear him call me an idle dog any day of the week. Oddly enough, I think I disappoint him. 'You were a jolly little lad, Dick,' he has said to me, 'and nearly drowned yourself half a dozen times sailing your boats before you were big enough to get into one. I thought I could never have kept you. By Jove, I was often as terrified as any old hen with a solitary duckling. And to think you should have been so content with the land-lubber's life after all!'"

"It is very good of you," I said again, feeling how inadequate the speech was.

"I only told you because—I didn't like you to think me an idle dog. I am always wanting to do something, really. What I've done in giving it up is nothing, of course. You don't know what Uncle Bob has been to me—father and mother both. He never looked harshly at me, not even when I broke his orchid. I could tell you things—would bring the tears to your kind eyes. There; it is nothing to give up for him."

"Here we are at the farm," I said, "and if you don't take care in lifting that gate, it will knock you down. It has a nasty trick of collaring you, and then rolling over you."

"It would be invaluable in a scrimmage," said Mr. Benyon, suddenly recalled to his good-humour.

"I'm afraid I've been whining," he said apologetically, as we went homewards; "but I have a ridiculous desire that you should think well of me."

"So I do," I said.

"Honour bright, Miss Joan?"

"Honour bright."

"Well, then, I don't deserve it. But your doing it puts me more in the way of deserving it."

His face beamed as he said it. And yet women are spoken of as the illogical sex.

CHAPTER IX.

THE NEW GARDENER.

THE garden has its screen of holly and privet and yew, but the kitchen-garden lies behind an old wall of red brick stained to purple and bronze, upon which the peach flowers deliciously in spring, and the cherries and the apricots. Money will not make you such a garden. A garden ought to be as old as a man before its ripeness is seen to perfection. Some time this must have been well cared for, and though the weeds were luxuriant in its corners in my days, the fruit had not fallen away.

In the garden, the roses, for lack of new blood, were deteriorating to their first exquisite singleness, and all the flowers were giving way to overmuch leafage. But in the kitchen-garden the plums were as large as eggs; the apples, though not large, had a delicious flavour; and the pears were yellow and luscious. In the spring I had put in new strawberry plants, so they had not borne that year; but the ruby and white raspberries made up for the loss of the strawberry crop.

I love a kitchen-garden. I am sure the jewelled trees in *Aladdin* were not finer than currant-bushes when the strings of scarlet and amber and onyx fruit hang like miniature bunches of grapes on the boughs; and I doubt

if there is any smell much pleasanter than the smell of currant-bushes, sharp and kindly, and full of memories. I often wonder the flowering currant is so little sung by the poets. It comes in the teeth of winter; it blooms long; I have heard that it sheds its tender mercies freely in the murkiest of towns, though happily of towns I know little.

As for sweetness, my garden had sweets to spare. About the beds, beyond the line of box-hedges, stood clumps of hollyhock, cabbage-roses, the sweet-brier, lavender, and the gorgeous sweet-peas. Mignonette had been sown freely for the bees. In July great sheaves of Mary-lilies stood up like swords. With these went the pleasant colour of the springing peas, the young lettuce, the beet, and the darkness of beans and potato-leaves. The vegetables had a fragrance of their own, not to speak of that little bed sacred to herbs of the pot, where thyme, mint, marjoram, basil, rosemary, were massed so tight as to remind one of Herbert's "box where sweets compacted lie".

The original lady of this garden must have had a still-room; for in a wild part of it the wild thyme and mints, the woodruff, and other delicious things for distillation grew side by side with verbena, valerian, borage, and many another plant of fragrance and savour.

The gardens are on a hill, side by side. A flight of stone steps led from the kitchen-garden to the orchard.

Another flight was cut in the grassy turf from the double hedge of the garden.

The orchard was given over to wildness—a mere tangle of gnarled boughs, below which, on the sunniest day, one might find green twilight. There, before we grew too much for Margaret Synnott and were sent to Madame Leloir's, I have played truant many a time, lying full length on the moss, with my chin propped on my hand, over a story-book, while the blossoms whitened and made rosy my bed, or the apples thudded about me, and there was a smell like a cider-press.

In a corner of the orchard was a hooded well, which had been our mother's terror for us when we were little. The water was icy cold, of a singular sweetness, and it had never been known to fail. Sometimes it was muddied with the rain. When it was clear one saw a bed of silver and gold pebbles below its still depths, which reflected the green boughs overhead. The well was something of a fairy tale to me. Whenever you looked in it you saw the silver fin of a tiny fish. You could not stoop for water without lifting one, and it was our delight as children to smuggle them into the nursery toilet-jug, where they were always sure to be discovered by Nuala, and restored to their native element.

Mother had feared the well so much that she had had it fenced about. The fence was rotten now, and no one troubled to replace it. The gnomon of the dial was

lying on one side. What matter? The boughs meeting in time above it had made its legend—

“I am the sun’s true shadow”—

a lie. The pigeon-cote, too, lay on its side, and the pigeons had found a safer house in the stables that made a part of the great courtyard behind the house, with its ranges of buildings that spoke of the former prosperity of the house.

Mother talked of Derrymore with tears in her eyes. To us Derrymore was a legend. Ardeelish was our home of memories, the kindly place that had cradled us, and we had no desire for anything finer.

It was in the kitchen-garden that Mr. Benyon surprised me. I had not looked for visitors, and I had my skirt pinned high about me, my sun-hat down on my eyes, my garden-gloves heavy with clay, and I was earthing up a trench of celery. It wasn’t really as hard work as it looked, for we had had a dry spell, and the earth was crumbling.

Suddenly the spade was taken imperiously from my hands, and I confronted my visitor. My first thought was of my eccentric appearance, but it seemed worse to attempt to set it to rights now, so I only stood and looked a little indignantly at him.

“How did you get in here?” I asked.

“Your mother sent me. But never mind that. You

don't mean to say that you do this rough work yourself."

"Who else would do it? I get Paddy Murphy, the father of my two young assistants, to dig the beds out for me in the early spring. But I can't afford to employ more than boy-labour for the rest of the year."

"I don't object to your gardening. But you mustn't do the rough work. Let me look at your hands."

Wondering at my own meekness, I drew off a glove and held out a hand for his inspection.

"Ah, I thought as much. Hard places where there once were blisters in those little palms."

"It used to hurt me at first. I have grown quite used to it now."

"I like you as *La Belle Jardinière*, but I don't want you to look like a peasant woman of Millet."

I don't know why I didn't ask him what business it was of his. Perhaps I had a little pleasure as well as alarm at this sudden solicitude for me.

"What am I to do?"

"You must employ a man; one who will have a certain amount of intelligence, together with a love of work, a pair of broad shoulders and strong arms, a willingness to learn, a readiness to obey. I know of such a one."

He was smiling now, and I smiled back at him. I had forgotten my short skirt, my clay-soiled overall, my stout brogues, and the general uncomeliness of my appearance.



M 630

MR. BENYON OFFERS HIS ASSISTANCE

"I don't really mind digging," I said irrelevantly. "The earth smells so good, and it makes you so deliciously hungry."

"But I mind your digging," he said; and again I did not ask him why he should bother about it.

"The thing I really do object to," I went on, as if he had not spoken, "is picking the slugs out of the strawberries, and cleaning the rose-bushes from the green-fly. The slugs in the wet weather are really something appalling. They are so large and black and—and fat."

"My man likes nothing better than handling slugs."

"But where is this *rara avis* to be found?"

"I can lay my hand on him at any minute."

"No gardener ever had so many virtues."

"This one has. I will warrant him."

"If I could run to it, which I doubt, I don't want a fine, scornful, short-tempered gentleman, who would despise my gardening, and would never let me pluck a thing for myself."

"His joy would be to obey you in every way."

"He would cost a fortune."

"Only a glass of beer now and again. And to be asked to tea sometimes. And to be rewarded by a smile from his mistress now and again."

"You mean yourself," said I, blushing in spite of myself. "I might have known when you ascribed so many

virtues to him. What if I have no vacancy for such a one?"

"Do you think," he said, "that I'm going to be half-dead for something to do outside the walls while you are digging within? digging with those hands!"

I did not reply.

"Excuse me for this once," he said, taking off his coat, and hanging it on the bough of a tree. "Next time I'll wear a blazer."

"Is there going to be a next time?" I asked helplessly.

"There's going to be a next time. I'm going to pieces from want of exercise. You have only to look at me to see how liverish I am. Just look at my eyes, now."

"I can't see anything wrong with your eyes."

"Ah, you haven't looked. You looked quite the other way. I am liverish, and I've nothing to do, no one to speak to, since Uncle Bob has taken to playing golf with Miss Trescott."

"Why don't you play with them?"

"It's a game for fogies. I may be liverish, but I'm not a fogey."

"It was yourself talked about having a liver, so you needn't be so indignant. I really don't believe you know what such a thing is."

"Ask Uncle Bob. He'll tell you I sometimes have the hump. It's slang, Miss Joan, but expressive. It means

the peculiar kind of unhappy temper which is caused in many instances by liverishness."

He was digging away energetically as he talked.

"If you go on at that rate," said I, "we'll soon have the garden under cultivation. Now I'll leave you. I'll find plenty to do over there. I must see what my assistants are about."

"They seem very fully employed staring at me."

"I'll tell them you're the new gardener. It will fill them with awe."

"Can't you stay here and instruct me, Miss Joan?"

"Your work is very straightforward. You recommended yourself for intelligence. This hardly calls for ordinary intelligence."

"If my words are going to be used against me like that—"

"You'll give notice."

"Everything except that. I get attached to my places. Miss Joan, don't tell Uncle Bob you've employed me. He'd never rest till he'd made you discharge me. He's very conscientious; and with his opinion of my phenomenal capacity for mischief in a garden, he'd be miserable till you got rid of me."

"But I'm not going to employ you, Mr. Benyon."

"Your mother has given me leave really, Miss Joan."

"Even she can't impose assistants on me against my will."

"Do let me dig here," he said, suddenly serious. "I sha'n't be in your way really. I sha'n't even speak to you if you tell me not to. But I hate to think of your digging and carrying heavy things about. Let me help you, and I shall be the least intrusive thing in the landscape."

"I will make no promises," I said grandly. "But as you've come, and you say mother has given you leave to dig our ground for us, why, you may for to-day."

I went away then and left him, busying myself by staking some rows of late dwarf peas. Now and again I looked over and saw Mr. Benyon energetically digging. By the way he put his back to it, it did indeed seem as though the work was pleasant to him for its own sake.

Presently mother came through her French window over to where I was.

"How very kind Mr. Benyon is to wish to help you," she said. "I really think he is a bit lonely here, Joan, not having a young man of his own age. How hard he seems to be working."

"You sent him out to me?"

"He asked if he might come. It's rather sad that he's so fond of gardening, yet his uncle will never permit him to do anything in his garden. He doesn't hinder you?"

"Does he look like it?"

"No, he looks very helpful, I must say. What a pleasant young fellow he is!"

"I am going to bring him in to tea presently."

"That is the least you can do, my dear. It is so amiable of him to wish to help. Very few young fellows like him would care to dig in a garden on a hot day like this. You don't think he's doing it just out of kindness—that we're imposing on him, Joan?"

"I don't think you need be anxious about it, dear."

"He was very kind. He asked me if there was anything he could do for me, anything I wanted at the village, or if there were letters to be posted. He really seemed without resources. Then he himself suggested the garden."

"He's all right," I said absently. "I dare say the digging's good for him. He hasn't got those broad shoulders for nothing."

"Well, don't let him overtire himself," said my dear mother, with the solicitude she had for all things. "I must see that there is something extra for tea. Boys require feeding so much more than girls."

She went back to her novel. Looking her way now and again, I saw her pretty head through the pane. It was a sultry afternoon, and the air was full of the hum of insects; but there was a cool lapping of the lake water, and there was a wind in the trees.

Now and again I was conscious that my new gardener looked my way, but I pretended to be absorbed at my task. At last I saw him come towards me. He was very hot, and the flush added to his comeliness.

"Time for beer?" I asked, looking up at him.

"I'm not thinking of beer," he said reproachfully. "I want you to come and see what I've been doing."

I followed him obediently. He had finished earthing up the celery, and he had dug out the bed where the early peas had been.

"Have I been good?" he asked, watching my face.

"Very good; the ordinary gardener would have taken half a day to it."

"You don't know how much I like it," he said, stretching himself, and working his arms up and down. "I've felt my muscles going soft like a girl's. There's nothing to do here to exercise them."

"You can row."

"Excuse me, Miss Joan; I can't leave my uncle an orphan."

"I'm very sorry; we must really get a new boat."

"Don't bother about me, Miss Joan. Gardening is quite good enough for me."

"If you're as good as you promise, I shall leave the garden to you, and devote myself to my fowls."

"Don't!" he said earnestly. "I can only work under orders. I go horribly wrong if I'm left to myself."

"Well, I shall have to supervise you, then, I suppose," I said resignedly.

"Won't you look at me now and again just to see how

I'm getting on? It would encourage me. You haven't looked my way all the afternoon."

"I think I shall ask your uncle to come in and superintend you."

"Don't! he'd worry me out of the place."

"Ah!" said I, as the gong sounded. "There's tea. Are you glad?"

"Very glad. I hope there is going to be a solid tea, I'm really hungry."

"You may trust mother to do justice to the labouring man."

He did indeed make the cold chicken and ham, the honey, and cream, and hot potato-cakes, vanish before him like smoke before the wind. Mother, who lives on nothing herself, watched him with rapt pleasure in his doings as a trencher-man.

"The work has made me so hungry," he said, having finished at last, and looking at her with a deprecating smile.

"I am so glad," said mother. "The strong need work; and the young ought to eat well."

"That is what I have been telling your daughter. She is going to let me work in the garden every day."

"That will be very nice and good for you," said mother simply.

CHAPTER X.

THE UGLY STEPSISTER.

ELIZABETH was in the highest of spirits. In spite of Miss Trescott's strictures the place had much more than paid its way during the two months that it had been "open to the world", as Nuala put it. Her success made Elizabeth eager for more worlds to conquer. She leant back in her hard chair and clasped her hands behind her brilliant, dark head.

"If I had only myself to consider," she said.

"What would you do? Try to rival Mrs. Langrishe?"

"I have a better scheme than that. I would make the place perfect of its kind, nothing of the kind that rowdy people want, but what the ridiculous advertisements call 'a home away from home' for gentle-people. There are ever so many nice people in the world who are homeless. I would carefully avoid anything that seemed like a hotel, except that there would be perfect liberty to come and go. We should appeal to people like Mr. Thorneycroft and Miss Trescott, who would settle down with us for a time, or permanently. The life would have as much eventfulness or uneventfulness as falls to the ordinary home life. Oh, I can see my plan growing and expanding! I have it in me to make it a success."

"How would you keep the other kind of people away?"

"By not advertising. I should send circulars to the names in Whittaker and Debrett in the first instance. But I should not need to do even that for long. People would come and would tell other people. Congenial society, lots of books and papers, the finest of sport. But what is the use of talking about it?"

"Why not, Betty?"

"I ought to be really older to carry it out, but I could dress older, and live up to it. You and Delia are the hindrances."

"I, a hindrance!"

"Yes, you, Joan; you are too pretty. So is Delia, and too young. I shall have to marry you off, or get rid of you in some way before I make the County Galway stare at the success of my schemes."

"You said I should be a help."

"It isn't your fault; you attract people. And Delia would be impossible among a parcel of strangers. I ought to have stuck to my point and sent her off to Madame's."

"She is doing very well with Margaret. Miss Trescott says her music is very good. And her French is fair. She is better read than either of us."

"She browses too much among those old books. Mother never interferes with her reading."

"Mother trusts her. I think she is justified; Delia is a good little thing."

"Too romantic by half. However, it's too late now,

I suppose, to talk about Madame's. But till Delia grows up, or is disposed of in some way, I realize that my plan is impossible. It will be years before she grows up."

"She is seventeen."

"And a baby, for all her cleverness."

"Miss Trescott is very fond of her. I heard her tell mother the other day that she would like to adopt her. Mother looked at her startled. 'We couldn't be happy away from each other,' she said, as though Miss Trescott had been serious. 'Oh, there are a pair of you!' said Miss Trescott, laughing; and then she added that since mother would not give her Delia, it only meant that she would be obliged to make Ardeelish her head-quarters."

"She shows no sign of going."

"I think she will stay on right through the winter."

"And Mr. Thorneycroft too?"

"He seems very happy where he is."

"The others will go back, I suppose."

"Mr. Benyon says they will come again."

"What will your garden do, Joan?"

"It will forget that it ever had a gardener."

Mrs. Langrishe came to see us that afternoon. Her visits were always welcome, but to-day she brought exciting news. She made us guess at its nature, but none of us guessed right. At last she had to tell us. There was going to be a ball.

"And now, who do you think is the giver?"

We guessed all the neighbours, but still we were wrong. Then Delia, who had been silent, cried out:

"It is your own ball, Mrs. Langrishe."

"You are right and wrong, little one. I shall preside at the ball, but I shall not be the giver. Of all people in the world the giver is Lord Kinvarra."

"Oh!" said Delia, and then fell silent.

But the rest broke out into expressions of surprise. Why should Lord Kinvarra, an unmarried man, and a shunner of society all his days, want to give a ball?

"It is a whim of the boy's. He says he wants to give a ball for someone who has never been at one. Who can it be, girls?"

"It is no index," said Elizabeth; "balls are so scarce in this part of the world."

"He will have been visiting about among the neighbours," said mother, "and will have heard some of the girls deploring the scarcity of gaieties. It is a kind thought."

But I saw that Delia had turned away, and was looking towards the garden, with her face drooped sideways and half-hidden in her hair. Yet I caught the sudden rich flush in her cheeks, and the momentary incredulous delight in her eyes. Could it be for Delia the ball was given?

"So Kinvarra Castle will be opened again," said mother. "It is a stately house for a ball. I remember

the long ball-room, with its mirrors, and the thousand glittering lights of the great candelabra. There is a gallery at one end for the musicians, and a raised dais round the room for the non-dancers. Five long windows open on to the verandah and the garden. The retiring-rooms are very pleasant. This boy's mother made a charming hostess, and I remember his father, wearing the collar of a knight of St. Patrick."

"I remember you too, Nora," said Mrs. Langrishe. "You were wearing white silk powdered with gold shamrocks."

"It had been my mother's. She had worn it at a Patrick's Ball at the Castle. We had furbished it up so that I might have a frock for the ball."

"It was your coming-out, and you were engaged before the night was over."

Mother blushed as softly, as brightly, as I had seen Delia blush a few minutes before. Then she sighed, and was silent.

Elizabeth meanwhile drummed with her fingers on the table.

"What are you going to wear, Betty?" asked her godmother.

"There will have to be new frocks. We have never been to a ball, only to little dances of the school-girls. I wonder what it is going to be like."

"Very fine. All Connaught will be ransacked for

dancing-men. We are to have a military band, and a troop of cooks down from Mitchell of Dublin."

"What shall I wear?"

"It ought to be white. But leave it to me. Your godmother shall dress you for your first ball."

Betty jumped up and flung her arms round her godmother's neck.

"There, don't choke me, child. I haven't given you anything for a long time. I want you to look your best."

"I shall try to. But Joan?"

"Joan must have white. Her fair darkness calls for white."

"Silk?" asked Betty.

"Poplin. Heavy white poplin trimmed with pink roses."

"It sounds delicious."

"It will be. I shall have a woman from town to fit you, Betty. Let her fit Joan at the same time."

Mrs. Langrishe is our *arbiter elegantiarum*. To her the damsels of the neighbourhood resort when there is a knotty point about clothes to be made straight. The world comes and goes about her house, and she has been to London and to Paris in quite recent times as we count them.

"Will it run away with an awful lot of money?" I asked timidly.

"Never mind, Joan," said Betty magnanimously. "We

don't mind, motherkin, do we? White poplin will last for ever. And there is only one dress to be considered, since godmother is giving me mine."

"And what about me?" Delia suddenly cried out in the most heart-broken way. "Am I not to go?"

"At your age to a ball! I should think not!" said Elizabeth.

"Oh, mother, am I not to go?" cried Delia again.

"Seventeen at a ball!" said Betty. "What would people think?"

"I want to go," cried Delia, as dolorously as the starling of the *Sentimental Journey* cried to get out.

It was so unlike her to insist that we gazed at her in perplexity and then at each other. She had lifted her face now, and in her eyes large tears had gathered.

"I am afraid you are too young, Delia," said mother hesitatingly.

"The neighbours would say in a little while that I and Joan must be pretty ancient, since they remembered Delia's being at this ball," urged Betty.

"It wouldn't make you any older, my dear," said mother. "But I am afraid, my little Delia, you are too young."

Delia's tears began to flow down her cheeks as though a frozen spring had suddenly given way.

"What is the matter, darling?" asked mother unhappily. "You are usually such a good child about things."

"We ought to have sent her to Madame Leloir's," said Betty. "It is a great mistake for a girl not to go to school. She grows up too soon. There is no proper line."

Delia had buried her face in mother's gown, and mother was softly caressing her hair.

"I suppose she is really too young, Ellen," she said, turning to Mrs. Langrishe as though to a court of appeal from Betty's decision. I read in her eyes that she had a faint hope the judgment might be in Delia's favour. But if so, it was quickly extinguished. Mrs. Langrishe had been looking from Betty to Delia and back again, as though perplexed. Now her gaze fixed itself on Betty's dark, glowing face.

"She is too young," she said in a low voice.

"Poor little girl," said mother. "You shall have that little puppy you liked so much at Matthew M'Cormick's the other day. I have found out he will sell it."

But Delia was not to be comforted.

"We couldn't have run to another frock, anyway," said Betty; "so that if Delia had been of an age to go, she and Joan would have had to toss up; to draw lots, I mean, motherkin; I beg your pardon."

Delia got up and ran out of the room with a little sob, and we heard her mounting the stairs to her own room.

"Poor little thing," said Mrs. Langrishe guiltily. "It is sad to see her so disappointed."

"I suppose it has to be," said mother. "She is only a child, and fancies a ball must be something very fine. She must have her puppy, and we shall get her a new frock for outdoors, Elizabeth. A pretty blue muslin. It will not cost much, and it will console her for staying at home."

"Poor monkey," said Betty, satisfied that she had carried her point. "She wouldn't have enjoyed the ball a bit if she had gone. She'd have been dropping off to sleep before half the night was over."

"Go to her, Joan," said mother. "I don't like to think of her crying all alone."

I went upstairs and knocked at the door of Delia's little room, and was bid come in by a melancholy and uncertain voice.

When I went in Delia was sitting by the window with her kitten in her lap. Her handkerchief, gathered up in a wet ball, was squeezed tightly in one hand. Such a mournful little figure in the pretty room, with its books and bits of painting and its little chintz-curtained bed, full of dancing sunlight from the reflections off the lake, which was to-day a sheet of broken gold, shimmering and trembling in the brilliant pale sun.

"Poor Delia," said I, sitting down by her.

She bit at a corner of her handkerchief.

"Mother would have let me go," she said, with her eyes filling again. "I could bear it better if mother

had wanted me to stay. I am Cinderella, and Betty is—the Ugly Stepsister.”

“And I am the other?”

“Oh no, dear, kind, pretty Jo! You would let me go, Jo, if it were only you.”

“But who is the Prince, Delia?”

She looked at me with eyes that fluttered before my gaze, like a pair of the little blue moths that are so airy among the furze and bracken.

“He—he—is giving the ball for me, Joan.”

I looked at her in some alarm. She was too young for sentimental dreams, and it would be bad if Lord Kinvarra, taking notice of her as a charming child, should awaken her to premature womanhood.

“Why do you think that, Delia?”

“You don’t believe me. You speak in such a cold, dry voice; but it is true, all the same.”

“How do you know?”

“I was reading Miss Thackeray one day when he was here, that story, you know, which is a kind of Cinderella. I told him I did not know what a ball was like—and—and—I should like to go to one. ‘And dance with the Prince?’ he said. ‘Why, yes,’ said I; ‘but he would be thinking of Cinderella.’ ‘He would be thinking of you,’ he said. It all rushed into my mind when Mrs. Langrishe said that he was giving the ball for someone. And now I shall not be there. He will dance with some-

one else. Of course he could not know I was—too young.”

“No, he could not know, of course, that you were too young,” I repeated, thinking that Betty had been right when she had said that Delia browsed a great deal too much among the old books, and had better have gone to Madame Leloir’s. And yet—and yet, I liked Delia better as she was.

“Well, you must put it all out of your head,” I said. “And think of your pretty new frock, and the puppy mother is buying for you from Matthew M’Cormick.”

She shook her head sorrowfully.

“You will not tell Betty nor anyone that I said he gave the ball for me?”

“You may trust me, Delia. But I wouldn’t think too much about that. He has probably met many other girls, and received a good deal of hospitality he wishes to repay.”

“He is giving the ball for me,” repeated Delia with childish obstinacy.

Poor little Delia! Well, I supposed she would have to get over her childish fancy, as many another girl has had to. I felt vexed that Lord Kinvarra should have come so often, and singled her out so much. Of course he talked a good deal to Betty too—his habit of silence was dropping away from him,—and he had seemed to admire Betty; but his eyes were for Delia.

The child had seen it herself. I wondered that mother had not noticed it, and Betty. But apparently they had not.

And it was of no use telling Delia that Lord Kinvarra might possibly not mean all he said to be taken literally, and warning her that men said many polite things to girls that were not to be regarded as serious. Delia only looked at me with unconvinced eyes, and remarked again that the ball was given for her.

CHAPTER XI.

THE GOLDEN DAFFODIL.

EVERYONE had been included in the invitations. I mean the four visitors who yet remained at Ardeelish as well as ourselves, and we had all accepted, all but poor Delia.

The day came—a beautiful, mild, September day, which promised an exquisite night. The only thing to be feared was that it would be too warm for dancing; but Mrs. Langrishe had told us that the gardens of Kinvarra Castle were to be lit with fairy lights, and used for a promenade, and as the sea-wind blew straight into them there would be coolness enough.

I could settle to nothing all that day, and marvelled exceedingly at the coolness of Betty, who went on

keeping her accounts and ordering meals as if nothing were going to happen.

Our frocks were not to arrive till the afternoon. What an awful thing it would be, I said to Betty, if the train broke down, or if Paddy Murphy's ass-cart, which was to fetch them from the railway-station, since both our steeds were to be in requisition at night, was to break an axle, or spill in a bog-hole, or anything.

"Nonsense," said Betty scornfully, "Paddy's ass-cart has been travelling that road for nearly twenty years. Why should it break down to-day?"

"Perhaps because it has been travelling twenty years. Or the ass might die; she's very old."

"Irish asses never die. Paddy told me the other day that he was going to transport her to Africay. 'The governmint's wantin' asses for Roadaisy,' said he; 'the mules out there is dyin' on thim. Roadaisy, judgin' by the name of it, is the place for her, an' there's another fifty years o' soft goin' in her, as I tould the governmint man.'"

"I hope she won't take it in her head to die this day of all days in the year," said I, with a fluttering heart.

"I'm more afraid," said Betty, "that the train might get in so very late that the ball would be half-way through before we got there."

"We shouldn't get there at all," said I, "for Mrs. Langrishe is calling for us, and as she's hostess she must

be there before any of the guests could arrive. What an awful thing it would be if the train were so late as that!"

"It was two hours and three-quarters late last Tuesday. It's never punctual except when it's too early. If the train were very late Paddy Murphy is quite capable of coming home without waiting for it. He hates to pass Inver churchyard even at dusk. He says it's the ass doesn't like it, but I am convinced it's himself."

"Be sure and tell him, Betty, he must wait."

"I'll tell him right enough, but I sha'n't be sure of those boxes till I see them. However, don't worry, Joan, I dare say it will be all right."

Betty went on, leaving my heart, if possible, more fluttering than before. However, I made up my mind that I wasn't going to fret about things that might never happen. There were so many things to be done. The fowl had to be attended to even if for this one day the garden must be left to my new gardener and his assistants. I felt I could only do things that were absolutely essential, so I saw to the food for the fowl, and removed the little newly-hatched ducks from under the hen to their coops, and set a clutch of eggs under the Houdan, and then I went indoors and washed my hair.

My hair-washing is rather a troublesome performance, for my hair is as long as the hair of the ladies in the

advertisement, and so thick that it hangs together like a cloak. I usually sit in the sun with a book and let it dry; but to-day that was impossible, for looking from the window I had seen Mr. Dick Benyon digging away in the garden, and looking anxiously now and again towards the house. Well, he would have to do as best he could by himself for one morning, for I couldn't possibly appear in a *peignoir*, with my hair hanging to the ground, and it would be lunch-time before I could get it dry enough to put up. So I wandered about in the safe regions of the west wing till my restlessness brought upon me a rebuke from Nuala, whom I had met two or three times during my wanderings.

"Miss Joan, you're like a hin on a hot griddle. 'Tis disturbin' my mind you are, bein' so onaisy."

"I can't help it, Nuala. It's my first ball, you see."

"Aye, I see the way it is wid you. You're full of fun an' mad for more. Ye think ye'll never be dancin'. Well there, I was the same once meself. Goodness be wid the time I was young! Sure we can't be young but wance. Sure I'd tell you not to set your heart on it, only it's no use talkin' to the young. They have it all before them, like the young bears wid their troubles."

"Oh, Nuala, do you think Paddy Murphy's to be trusted to fetch our ball-dresses from Carnaross?"

"Paddy's right enough—as long as he doesn't meet anywan to trate him. He'll bring them safe enough, barrin'

he might get drunk, or that the ass might step in a bog-hole, or that they might rowl off the cart when he's skelpin' home afeard o' the dark—I never knew such a wan for ghosts as Paddy,—or someone might stale them on yez. There's a lot o' tinkers, I hear, between this an' Carnaross. They'd stale the cross off an ass's back. Thin, maybe the dresses wouldn't be done. Maybe they'd never get sint at all, at all. Or th' ould address might get torn off them. Maybe 'tis peggin' away to the world's ind they are this very minyit. Them dressmakers in Dublin are terrific for lies, as I've heard tell from my second cousin's wife's aunt that was lady's-maid to the Honourable Mrs. Moody."

I stood silent in the face of these many evil chances.

"There, child," said Nuala sympathetically, "don't be meetin' trouble half-way. 'Tis as likely as not them dresses 'ud pass all the dangers that's attendin' on 'em, an' get to yez safe enough; though the world's taught me that the last thing that'll happen is that what ye're wishin' for to come your way. Sure, at the worst, child, you'll be no worse off nor Miss Delia, poor lamb!"

The next person I met was Miss Trescott, who came and went in the west wing as freely as ourselves. She was coming from mother's room, and wearing a look of subdued excitement. It struck me with a sense of wonder. She couldn't be excited over the ball, surely; she must have been at hundreds in her day, and at her

age, what could she expect from this one? She seemed very old to me, centuries removed from the delicious tremors which were racing through my blood and making it impossible for me to realize that in a few hours the ball would be only a memory.

"Why, Joan," she said, "Joan, under this cloud of night!"

She put her hands under my hair and lifted it.

"You lucky girl," she said, "it is like rivers of blackness. But where do you put it to every day?"

"It is heavy, Miss Trescott. I always wanted to cut it off. See where I began chopping at it, but mother surprised me, and wouldn't let me cut any more."

I lifted a strand a foot shorter than the rest. She took my hair again and drew it round my face.

"I want my woman to dress you to-night," she said; "she has great taste, and it is hard on her to have no better exercise for her talents than I make. I have settled with your mother. We dine at seven, so we shall see you and Elizabeth in your frocks at dinner. I believe you must start early on account of Mrs. Langrishe. Her brougham will be here at eight."

"And you, Miss Trescott, you are coming with us?"

"No, we should crush each other's frocks. Little Thorneycroft and I are taking the covered car. The others, the general and his nephew, are to pick up Dr. Bennett on the way."

"You'll be horribly bumped about."

"I shall enjoy it; so will little Thorneycroft."

"Thank you so much for letting Stephanie help me to dress, Miss Trescott; but what about yourself?"

"She needn't dress me till after dinner. Thorneycroft and I are going to be fashionable. We shall arrive when the revelry is at its height. By the way, my dear, there is a little box coming for you with my love. Stephanie shall bring it when she comes to dress you. There, my dear, I haven't many pleasures possible to me. I have neither kith nor kin, and more money than I know what to do with. Do you suppose that poor Margaret Synnott of yours was ever at a ball?"

"If she was, it must have been a long time ago," I said, answering the irrelevant question. "But do let me thank you, dear Miss Trescott, for your gift; it is dear of you. Do tell me what it is!"

"At 6.30 you shall know—not a minute sooner. Stephanie is to dress Elizabeth first. You can look on at that if you like. Then she will take you."

"Six mortal hours, Miss Trescott! How am I to bear it? Miss Trescott, you don't think our boxes will not arrive all right, do you?"

"Why, what would happen them, child? There, don't worry yourself; everything will be all right. You must trust yourself to Stephanie, by the way. Let her do as she will with you. Her ideas are quite original, but

always charming. I long to see what Stephanie will make of you."

"Poor little Delia, Miss Trescott."

"Delia will be all right, my dear," Miss Trescott replied briskly.

"I wish she were coming to the ball."

"That is kind, Joan. Never fear; the child will be happy."

But I shook my head. I knew more about Delia's feelings than Miss Trescott did.

At lunch I avoided Mr. Benyon's eye, which was full of reproach, and listened to his uncle rallying him on the idle way he had presumably spent the morning, which he had employed playing a foursome at the links with Dr. Bennett, Mr. Porteous the vicar, and his curate. I heard Mr. Benyon promise to come and look at the play during the afternoon, after which he said he meant to walk over to Carnaross, where he expected a parcel by the afternoon post. I sent him a little glance then, suspecting that he was vexed because I had not appeared in the garden that morning, but he refused to meet my eye. Never mind, I said to myself, we should make it up at the ball.

After lunch the house seemed to empty itself, and everything was very quiet. I made my own preparations for the evening, setting out my shoes and stockings, my fan and trinkets, as though doing so would hasten the wished-for hour.

Betty complained that I worried her; and Delia looked so melancholy with her head in a book when I peeped into the old nursery, which was now sacred to her and Margaret Synnott, that I retired silently. Mother had lain down, Margaret was gone home, and the house seemed under a strange spell of silence.

However, the longest afternoon passes; and at half-past five, to my relief, Paddy Murphy arrived with the boxes. There was a big one for Betty, a big one for me, and a big one for Miss Trescott, so big that it looked as if she too had been indulging in a new ball-gown.

"I've the mistress's orders," said Nuala, seizing on the boxes, "that yez are only to see your dresses when 'tis time to get-into thim."

Indeed, when I would have gone to my own room before attending Betty's robing, I met Stephanie coming away with the key in her hand. "Madame's orders," she said, smiling all over her vivacious face. So perforce I had to wait.

Ours are big bare rooms, side by side, in which the little beds and the tall, old-fashioned furniture seem mere islands in a sea of white, well-scrubbed boards. Usually the light at evening is rather insufficient. But Stephanie had levied contributions all over the house, and when she ushered us in, with a smile on her wide mouth, Betty's room was brilliantly illuminated.

Betty scorns my youthful enthusiasm, but I heard

a catch in her breath as she looked about her. Her little bed was covered with a golden heap, which Stephanie, seizing dexterously, displayed to us. It was Betty's frock, daffodil-colour, of dull silk, and trimmed about the neck and shoulders with foamy chiffon. The stockings and shoes to match were beside it, and a short cloak of yellow velvet lay on the pillow.

Dearest child, said the note which was pinned to the cloak, *These ought to be white, but I fancied you in gold. I will repair the omission when I present you one of these days. Also I send some jewels which I have been keeping for you till you were of an age to wear them.*

"She has given me her diamonds and pearls!" said Elizabeth in an awe-struck voice, lifting the collar and the star from their beds of white velvet. "Oh, what a godmother!"

"What, indeed!" cried I, jumping about in an ecstasy. "Mine never takes any notice of me."

"You should have chosen one who hadn't a houseful of daughters," said Elizabeth, putting the star against her hair.

"Now, mad'moiselle will place herself in my hands," said Stephanie a little impatiently.

I watched the process fascinated. Even the mere washing of the face became a rite in Stephanie's hands. There was a deft kneading with the fingers first. "Mad'moiselle is young, and has the beautiful skin," explained



Stephanie, as her fingers worked hither and thither, "but she no tek care; the sun and the wind are the enemy." Then a steaming with scented vapours, a rubbing in of unguents, a washing off with perfumed waters. Stephanie laughed in triumph as she watched our faces. "It seem no worth while, Miss Jo-an?" she asked smiling. "Ah, but it ees. Beauty is always worth while, and to conserve it—that ees the secret."

Elizabeth glowed like a ripe peach as she emerged from the Frenchwoman's hands. Then her hair was piled up in a soft, stately mass on top of her head; her star was adjusted in it. The washing of her hands was another lengthy process, what with the manicuring and polishing of the finger-nails. "You have been neglect," said Stephanie. "Ah, your cold baths! what barbarity! You have the cold bath, and you think all is done. Gr-r-r!" Stephanie gave a dramatic shudder. "It would be the death of me. A little water, and that warm; that ees what I say to my ladies. The cold bath; *non, non*, I would die first.' But they will have the cold bath all the same."

At last Elizabeth was finished, from the crown of her head to the soles of her feet beautiful, good to look upon as a daffodil in spring, one of the great single daffodils that gild all our orchard in a bright and windy March.

As I stood away and looked at her I had a sudden intuition. Mrs. Langrishe wanted Lord Kinvarra to

marry Elizabeth—I had known as much before,—and on this evening she had staked her hopes. That was why she had dressed Elizabeth—too magnificently for her youth, though the queenly garb became her. That was why she had said that Delia was too young for the ball, and saying it, had looked guilty. Well, after all, Lord Kinvarra was probably only interested in Delia as in a pretty child, and Elizabeth was surely the fitter mate for him. To-night, indeed, in her golden glory she must needs eclipse for him the memory of Delia in her shadowy hair, her face like a little star seen in twilight.

I stepped to Elizabeth and kissed her. Already I saw in her the bride and the lady of Kinvarra Castle.

“There will be none so beautiful as you, Betty,” I cried.

“Ah, Joan,” she laughed, “you always thought better of me than I deserved! I hope other people will admire me as you do.”

She flashed a radiant glance upon me, as though she viewed worlds yet unconquered. As she looked over my head I knew she was not thinking of me, but neither was she thinking of Lord Kinvarra, nor of anyone else in particular.

“I should like always to wear fine clothes,” she said. “It doesn’t please me a bit to be pottering about after accounts and dinners.”

“You ought to have been uncle Peter’s heiress,” said I.

"If he could only see me now I should conquer him," she cried. "Where could he better bestow his guineas?"

"But Mad'moiselle Joan—she will not be dress," said Stephanie, who had been looking from one to the other of us. "Come, mad'moiselle. I haf the key of the Blue-beard's Chamber."

"Why, I had nearly forgotten about myself, Stephanie," said I.

"But Time will not forget," said Stephanie. "Time, he goes."

The deliberation of her syllables reminded one of a clock striking the passing of the hours.

CHAPTER XII.

THE PRINCE.

I FOLLOWED Stephanie with a beating heart. She had taken a pair of candles from Elizabeth's room, and had given me a second pair to carry. When we went in she lit half a dozen others about the room. Then she approached the bed, and holding a light over her head, pointed to my frock.

There it lay stretched to its full length, a mass of soft, lustreless white silk. At the foot of the skirt was a

trail of pink roses. There were sleeves of the roses. All the rest of the frock was white. A little wreath of roses lay upon the gown. I took it up.

"And this?" I asked in a subdued voice.

"Ah, that mad'moiselle shall see. That will be—charming. But see there! Mademoiselle has not seen all. Here is the gift of my mistress. Look, then!"

I looked into the box that stood on a chair by the bed. In it there were a pair of white silk shoes with pink roses by way of rosettes, white silk stockings, and a little shoulder-cape of white velvet exactly like Elizabeth's, except for the colour.

"They are too beautiful!" cried I in rapture.

"Not for mad'moiselle, as she will leave my hands. Hurry, then. There is no time to delay. Mad'moiselle Elizabeth did take so much of time."

I went through the same process of beautifying as Elizabeth. When Stephanie came to my hair, and let it down to its full length, the artist revealed itself in her. With murmurs and purrings of delight she gathered it in her hands and let it fall away again, twisting it this way and that way while she kept up a running commentary on its length and thickness. Presently she lifted it and began coiling it up into shining, old-fashioned bandeaux. I watched her with interest. She let the side-locks droop below my ears, then lifted them as you may see it in early pictures of the Queen.

Suddenly she caught sight of me watching her in the glass.

"*Non, non,*" she said imperatively, "mad'moiselle is not to look, not till she is finished perfectly, not until I say she may."

She tilted the glass so that I could no longer observe her movements or my own reflection in it. Then she hastened on with my toilette, chattering all the while.

At last my dress was on and I was ready down to my shoes. Then Stephanie turned me to the long cheval glass between the two windows, holding a light beside my face.

I could not believe it was really myself I saw. Nothing could have better become me than the dull white silk. The little wreath of roses rested lightly on my black hair. I had no colour in my face, except my lips and my eyes, yet I was not pale. As I looked at myself I blushed suddenly. I was thinking of how I should look—to someone else.

The thought made my entrance into the dining-room difficult to me. The gong had sounded some minutes before I had finished dressing. As I ran downstairs I met little Kitty, who stood aside to let me pass.

"Glory be!" she said, lifting up her hands. "You're like a fairy or an angel, no less, Miss Joan, dear."

"You silly girl," said I, as I ran in. There was no time for listening to Kitty's compliments.

When I opened the dining-room door I saw that all were in their places. I longed to steal in unperceived, so shy did I feel, but General Benyon, who was nearest the door, and whose chair was by mine, stood up as I came in and made way for me with an old-fashioned compliment. I slid into my seat, thankful for the dim light of the shaded candles. It was the first time, really the first time, I had been beautifully dressed, and I hardly dared lift my eyes for fear of what I might see in the eyes of—someone.

And yet, surely Betty must have eclipsed me for everyone. She carried her beautiful gown and her jewels as though by royal right, and where she was always bright, witty, and charming, she now shone ten-fold, as though her finery exhilarated her, which no doubt it did.

Presently I sent mother a little smile along the table, and she smiled back at me. Mother had made her own simple toilette, and I thought she couldn't have looked sweeter than in her gray silk with its yellowish lace fichu and her old-fashioned emeralds about her neck.

By the time the fish was being removed I found courage to look at my opposite neighbour. He was leaning back, crumbling his bread, and watching me lazily. Something in his gaze made me turn my eyes away quickly.

By and by one of the maids came and whispered to

mother, and, apologizing to the others, she stood up and beckoned to Elizabeth and me. Mrs. Langrishe's brougham was at the door. As I ran upstairs to put on my cloak Kitty intercepted me.

"Mr. Benyon bid me lave a little box in your room, miss," she said, "and the other little gentleman, Mr. Thornercroft, bid me do the same by another."

On my dressing-table I found a great bouquet of roses from Dick Benyon. Mr. Thornercroft's box contained Russian violets. I looked at the latter irresolutely for a moment. Then I took a handful of them and put them in my belt. I carried the roses in my hand.

As I went downstairs I thought of Delia, who had not appeared at dinner. I went into her room, and found it in darkness but for a faint moonlight, and was going out again when I heard a little sound of sobbing. I went over and found Delia lying on her bed in the dark.

"Poor little Delia," I said, "it would have been twice as happy if you were coming too."

"I saw you go downstairs. You looked lovely, and I might have had a frock like that," Delia cried between her sobs.

"Never mind, dear. There will be other balls. It isn't the last in the world."

"But this one will never come again," she said, "and this was to be my ball. Listen, Joan, if he—says

anything about my not coming, will you tell him I wanted to come?"

"I will tell him," I said, but in my heart I thought that if he had eyes he must forget Delia in looking upon Elizabeth.

As I got into the carriage I noticed that Elizabeth carried flowers, roses, that looked in the dim light almost exactly like mine. I was wondering if Mr. Benyon had sent them to her as well as to me when she lifted up her bouquet to me.

"That dear little Mr. Thorneycroft," she said. "I see he has given you flowers too. He must have sent to Covent Garden for them. How lucky they are yellow roses. Are yours yellow also, Joan?"

"Mine are pink," I said, lifting my bouquet with its long streamers of pink ribbon. I was glad, yes, really glad, that it was Mr. Thorneycroft who had thought of Elizabeth.

"Why, how very clever of him!" said Elizabeth. "Who has the violets? There is such a delicious scent of them."

"Mr. Thorneycroft sent me some," I said.

"Now, why didn't he give me violets as well?" said Elizabeth aggrievedly; "I love violets."

"I left mine with Delia, except these I am wearing, else you should have them."

"Poor little Delia," said Mrs. Langrishe with com-

punction, "I hope she didn't take her disappointment to heart too much."

"I thought it best to let her alone," said mother.

"I left her in tears," said I.

"I can't imagine why she was so keen on this ball," said Elizabeth; "she has always been so glad to be at home. If she had been there nothing would have coaxed her from the shelter of motherkin's skirts."

We drove on in a fine state of excitement, so that I forgot poor little Delia before I was half-way. We arrived with just enough time to shake out our skirts after the long drive and preen ourselves generally before the crowd came.

Lord Kinvarra met us in the hall. I noticed that he looked at our group of four as though he expected someone else.

"The others are coming on," explained Elizabeth, answering the question in his face.

"Your sister?" he began.

"Oh no, not Delia!" said Elizabeth. "Delia is a child hardly out of the nursery."

"Ah, I am sorry!" he said, and a little cloud came on his brow; "I had hoped to see her."

I thought Mrs. Langrishe looked a little scared and guilty. However, he turned and walked by Elizabeth's side as we mounted the stairs, and I saw him take up her programme, which a pretty maid had just presented

to her, and initial several dances rapidly. Elizabeth looked at him with her dark head sideways and her irresistible air of triumphant beauty. I should hardly need to give him Delia's message, I thought.

In a few minutes the rooms were filling rapidly. Elizabeth was carried off by Sir Max Chetwynd, an elderly admirer of hers who had, report said, been in love with mother. Mother was absorbed into a group of matrons who were settling themselves on the dais at one end of the ball-room. Dancing had not yet begun, but my programme was filling rapidly when I felt a pluck at my skirt. I turned and saw Georgie O'Hara.

"How awfully jolly you look!" she said.

"And you, Georgie; that green is a stroke of genius with the red-brown of your hair."

I looked admiringly at Georgie's tall figure. The delicate leaf-green became her admirably, and the garland of green leaves about her russet head. Her colour and her eyes were as bright as ever, yet there was something—something which made me say:

"What is it? There is something the matter, Georgie."

"Is it written on my face so plainly as all that, Joan? Can those who run read? Then I had better have stayed at home."

"No one would know, Georgie. You look splendid—but there is something."

"Yes, there is something. Come in here. This is a nook for happy lovers, which no one has discovered yet. The night is young."

I followed her into a little room, hardly more than a closet, with a couch, and a rose-shaded lamp among palm-trees, filling it to its utmost capacity.

"I think you must be in love, Joan," she said. "Your eyes are so sharp."

She looked at me an instant, but since I said nothing she went on:

"There is something the matter, Joan, something badly the matter for me. Tom Crosby's come to the end of his tether. He's clearing out."

"Clearing out! What do you mean, Georgie?"

"He's spent his last penny here. Now by some extraordinary chance he has been offered the position of Master of the Horse at the court of the Rajah of Khansore, an Oriental potentate who apes European ways. It's five thousand rupees a-year. Will just pay Tom's native servants. He's going, Joan."

I looked at her for a moment, silent with sympathy. Then I spoke out the thought that was in my mind.

"Why should he go, Georgie? Your grandmother left you a thousand a-year."

"I wish she hadn't. If I were penniless, Tom might ask me to share the Rajah's rupees, which are barely enough for one."

"Why do you let him go, Georgie?"

"I can't ask him to stay, Joan. There has never been a word of love between us. Only comradeship and good-fellowship. I often wonder what Tom Crosby can be made of."

"Everyone knows he's in love with you."

"I haven't heard it — on the best authority. He's going, anyhow."

"After following you about since you were a little girl. I wonder how he thinks he has a right to go!"

Georgie laughed.

"Poor Tom. He was too poor always for a sweetheart or a wife. You wouldn't deny him a friend."

"He should have thought of you."

"I believe he does think of me. Someone has put it into his head that we are set down as belonging to each other. He is standing out of my light, don't you see, Joan? It is poor Tom's idea of honour. Tom isn't very clever, you see, Joan. He knows the points of a horse, and how to be a good friend, and he has his own queer notions of riding straight. This is one of them."

"It's a stupid notion," said I.

"It is," said Georgie. "He'd never think of sharing that wretched income of mine."

"Oh, Georgie, what will you do?"

"I'm not going to think of it yet, Joan. After to-night the deluge. And, by the way, there's the band. I

believe I'm engaged to Tom for the first waltz. They're opening with a quadrille. This is going to be my last good night, Joan."

"Tom Crosby is a silly man," said I. "How brave you are, Georgie!"

"I'm going down with the flag flying, Joan. No one shall know but you—and dad. Dad knows, though he will never speak of it. I am only afraid that other people will guess from the way he looks at me. He looks so plainly that I'm well-plucked, and he's proud of me."

"He wouldn't object, Georgie?"

"Not he, nor the mater either. They're as little this-worldly as Lady Burke, though perhaps not so much other-worldly. There goes the waltz. Tom will be looking for me. I'm going to dance every dance he asks me for with Tom to-night. It will be the last time."

We returned to the dais. Almost the first person we encountered was Mr. Tom Crosby, looking leaner than ever as he surveyed the horizon anxiously for Georgie.

"Ah, there you are!" he cried in relief. "I thought I'd run you to earth somewhere about here. Come along, Georgie."

Georgie smiled back at me over his shoulder as they floated away in the waltz. I was looking after them when someone came up to me. It was Lord Kinvarra.

"Am I lucky enough to find you disengaged, Miss Joan?" he asked.

"Yes, I am free for this dance."

I had indeed been keeping it on the chance of someone else arriving in time to claim it; but there was no sign of any of the rest of our party.

We took a few turns, and then left the crowded ball-room and went out to the verandah. It was almost empty, and we sat down at a dim end, where the leaves of a creeper let an occasional shaft of moonlight through.

"Miss Joan," he said, "why didn't your little sister come?"

"They thought she was too young to come," I began hesitatingly.

"Who thought?"

"Betty, mother, everyone."

"I have a great mind to go and fetch her," he said, standing up and confronting me.

I stared at him and said nothing.

"She wanted to come?" he asked.

"She told me to say that she would have come if she could."

"How did she take it?"

"She cried," I said. His vehemence seemed to force the truth from me.

"Poor little child! The ball was given for her. I am

going to your mother, Miss Joan. I am going to ask if I may not fetch her."

"It is eight miles of a drive. Delia is probably in bed and asleep. She has no frock ready."

He looked impatiently at me, and then stood biting his nails.

"I forget that I am come back to conventions," he said.

"Never mind," said I consolingly. "She is very young, after all. It was kind of you to want to give her pleasure."

"Kind!" he repeated after me. "It was kind to myself. The ball was hers, don't you see? I only gave it for her."

"And we are all here on false pretences?"

He smiled grimly.

'Not altogether that, Miss Joan.'

"I believe this is our dance," interrupted another voice. "I have been searching all the rooms for you, Miss Joan. How do you do, Lord Kinvarra?"

Mr. Benyon was regarding his host in a way which I vaguely felt to be hostile. I slipped my hand into his arm, and went into the ball-room with him.

"Why were you there?" he asked imperiously.

"Because Lord Kinvarra wanted to know why Delia had not come. He is very kind; he asked her, but they, everyone, thought she was too young. He was greatly disappointed, talked of going to fetch her."

My partner's brow cleared magically.

"Ah, that was it, poor beggar," he said. "I thought there was something up with him. It certainly is uncommonly rough on him that little Miss Delia should be too young."

CHAPTER XIII.

CINDERELLA.

HOW jolly that was!" I said, as the waltz ended with three loud chords.

"It was delightful," agreed my partner, looking down at me and smiling.

"It is the first time I have danced at a real ball," I said. "Fortunately you dance well enough to cover my inexperience."

"An idle man's learning," he answered. "I have danced in most of the European capitals, so I ought to know how to do it. I don't pretend to despise it with a partner like you, and a floor like this. How many more dances am I to have?"

"How many do you want?"

"All."

"I'm afraid that mustn't be," said I lightly. "I am engaged for ever so many. Besides, I want you to dance with some of my friends."

"I shall be delighted if I cannot dance with you."

Georgie O'Hara passed at this moment, and waved her fan to me in greeting.

"That is one of them," said I.

"She looks—good: wholesome and of the open air."

"She is out in all weathers. Then there is her sister Madge; the tall girl in pink over yonder."

"Ah! the girl in pink, with red hair."

"The hair is really chestnut, Mr. Benyon."

"The colour of an autumn leaf. I like the audacity of the pink."

"You will like Madge, and Georgie too. I think I like Georgie best. But they are both—good comrades."

"They look it. But now let us talk about ourselves. Are you engaged for this dance?"

"No; it is a quadrille."

"Well, let's go up to the gallery and watch the dancers. I have been up there already in my hunt for you. There is an oriel window at one end, and a couple of chairs. It is like a box at the theatre."

As we crossed the hall we met Mr. Thorneycroft.

"So you have come," I said.

He looked at me eagerly—first at my roses, and his face clouded. I smiled at him and touched the violets in my belt. A look of almost incredulous happiness came over his wistful little face.

"Ah, Miss Joan, how kind you are!" he said. "You

will give me a dance, perhaps, since you are so good?"

I handed him my programme without a word, and he set his initials against a dance.

"It must be before twelve," he said, "for Miss Trescott is carrying us off then."

"Why, how unkind! You'll get no supper."

"Cinderella didn't wait for the ball-supper, you know," he said, smiling.

"I confess I don't see the connection, Mr. Thorneycroft."

"The quadrille is forming," said Mr. Benyon, a little impatiently; "and our seats will be taken. Don't go home with Miss Trescott, Thorneycroft. The fun will be only beginning. We have a seat for you."

"Ah, thank you! I ought to return perhaps as I came," said Mr. Thorneycroft, a little chillily.

"Strikes me Thorneycroft has his back up against me, Miss Joan," said Mr. Benyon as we climbed the stairs. "Funny in such an amiable little chap, isn't it? So far as I know I've done nothing."

"He has old-fashioned ideas, I think. That is why I fancy he answered so stiffly. But why should Miss Trescott carry him off at twelve?"

"And what did he mean about Cinderella?" We were taking our places by this time.

"There goes your friend, Miss O'Hara, with that little

man in pink, like a jockey. She's been with him every time I've seen her."

"Don't speak disrespectfully of Tom Crosby. He is the straightest and most daring rider to hounds in the county Galway."

"I take my hat off to Mr. Tom Crosby. I suppose that is why Miss Georgie likes him. She's half a head taller than he."

"Love doesn't take count of inches," I said unwarily.

"Is it a match, then?" Mr. Benyon asked with interest.

I was vexed with myself for betraying Georgie, even to him.

"It was a stupid thing for me to say," I answered. "I only meant they were such great friends. Georgie told me to-night that he was going to India—for good, as they say."

"Without Miss Georgie?"

"He hasn't a penny to bless himself with."

"The more reason he should have her. But perhaps she wouldn't have him—if he is a poor beggar."

"I don't think Georgie would mind that. But perhaps we are discussing her affairs rather unwarrantably."

"I beg your pardon, Miss Joan. I take a—a—sympathetic interest just now in love and lovers."

I was not listening to him.

"Who—who—" I gasped, "is that dancing with Lord Kinvarra?"

My eye had just rested on a pair in the quadrille which had not yet started.

"Seems uncommonly like your little sister, Miss Joan."

"Why, it *is* Delia! And what a frock! Where can she have got it? And how does she come here?"

"Perhaps Thorneycroft's apparently daft remark about Cinderella explains it."

"Why, to be sure. Miss Trescott must have brought her. Poor little Delia, I'm awfully glad! I do hope mother and Betty won't be angry."

"I'm very glad for Kinvarra, poor beggar. See how pleased he looks! But where is Miss Elizabeth, the Golden Girl?"

"I don't see her anywhere. But don't speak to me for a minute. I want to take in Delia's frock—even at this distance."

It was something ideally young that clad Delia's childish form. White chiffon, all frills and foam. A string of pearls was in her hair, another about her throat. She danced as to the manner born, bobbing up and down as prettily as a daisy. Even at this distance Lord Kinvarra's pleasure in her was obvious. He was smiling boyishly all over his sunburnt face as he danced. When they were not dancing he still looked down at her smiling. Why, they looked like lovers! I was afraid all the room must see it.

"Have you taken in the frock?" said Mr. Benyon at my elbow.

"I am going down to condole with mother. I hope she won't be vexed."

"She doesn't look as if she could scare anyone."

"Because she is so gentle her displeasure is hard to bear. And Delia is her pet. Poor little Delia, Betty will be vexed. Not so much because of Delia's being present at the ball as because her opinions are disregarded. Just at the first I don't think she really minded whether Delia went or not."

"We are all like that, fond of nailing our colours to the mast for what was at first a mere whimsy."

"Betty thinks we should be rudderless, anchorless without her."

"Her masterfulness becomes her. But you're not going now, Miss Joan, with the dance in full swing?"

"I can skim the walls. I see mother. There is the top of her head, and there is her gray silk lap and her dear hands folded in it. I expect she misses her knitting."

"You will give me the next dance, then."

"It is Mr. Thorneycroft's. Our next dance is No. 7."

"I shall take you to your mother, then; and I shall go and have a smoke while you're dancing with Thorneycroft."

I thought Mr. Benyon was a little put out, but I was so keen about Delia that I really hardly cared.

We got safely round the skirts of the dancers to where mother was sitting. There Mr. Benyon bowed and left me; and looking after him I saw him making for the verandah.

Miss Trescott was sitting by mother, and the two of them were looking immensely pleased. Nevertheless mother's gaze, as it met mine, was deprecatory.

"You've seen Delia?" I broke out.

Mother nodded.

"Why, you knew she was coming!" I said. "You plotter! That explains your air of subdued excitement."

"The poor child," began mother, looking at me appealingly.

"I'm awfully glad she's here," I said. "It was the one shadow on my pleasure to think of her crying in the dark at home."

"That's my Joan!" said mother, with such an air of relief that I understood at once she had been afraid of my siding with Betty against her. "Here's the real culprit," she went on, indicating Miss Trescott.

Miss Trescott smoothed her ample plum-coloured silk lap.

"Come and sit by me, Joan," she said, "and I'll tell you all about it. I am the Fairy Godmother."

"And Betty and I are the great, gawky red-nosed sisters. I saw them once in a Dublin pantomime."

"You recognize the likeness, my dear. Well, anyhow, to continue the fairy tale. I had noticed my poor little Cinderella fretting because she couldn't go to the ball, and it fretted me, Joan. I'm fond of the child. So at last I attacked your mother here on her weak side—"

"That's Delia," put in mother, smiling.

"And got her permission to do as I would. She also helped me to little Cinderella's measurements. But she left the management entirely to me. I have to answer to Betty. Well, Cinderella's frock came down with your own this afternoon, my dear. And Stephanie, who loves a bit of intrigue, set it all out in my room. Immediately after you had driven away this evening I dressed and then I went into little Cinderella's room. She had gone to bed, and was lying awake and miserable in the dark room with her supper untouched, as I saw by the light of my candle. 'Are you going, Miss Trescott?' she asked limply. 'I'm not Miss Trescott, my dear,' said I. 'I'm the fairy godmother. My coach with six horses is waiting at the door, and my wand has just called up the sweetest of frocks and a little pair of glass slippers, which are awaiting you on my bed.' She stared at me with her great eyes. 'Oh!' she cried with the most dolorous of voices, 'you're not in earnest. And if you were, what would mother say?' 'I'm in earnest, my dear,' I said, 'and your mother knows. That was why she wouldn't come in to say good-night. She was afraid she would

have to betray the secret.' 'I thought she did not come,' said the poor little mouse, 'because she was so sorry for me.'"

Watching mother's eyes, I saw them fill with tears, but her lips were smiling.

"Then she sprang out of bed, and followed me into my room, and when she saw her frock she couldn't speak for ecstasy, but stood there with her hands clasped and her lips parted. So I gave her over to Stephanie, and Stephanie dressed her, and we made her drink a big cup of bouillon which Stephanie had prepared for her, and so we wrapped her up in her little white cloak, and carried her off to the ball."

"She looks lovely, though I haven't seen her close. I want to get near that frock."

"I am glad you admire my taste, my dear."

"My little girl's kind friend!" said mother, laying her hand an instant on Miss Trescott's plump, dimpled hands.

"I look on Delia almost as my own," said the lady. "She is bewildered with pleasure. I wonder if she will remember twelve o'clock?"

"Twelve o'clock! Why twelve o'clock?"

"It is in the fairy tale, my dear. To make it perfect she should lose a slipper. But she must go home at twelve to have her beauty-sleep. We can't have our little girl withered by untimely sitting up."



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"WHEN SHE SAW HER FROCK SHE COULDN'T SPEAK FOR ECSTASY"

"To make it perfect you should have the Prince, Miss Trescott."

"Why, I think we have the Prince, my dear," said Miss Trescott.

Mother blushed, and looked a little troubled and a little glad. I followed the direction of their eyes. Delia was coming towards us with a hand resting on Lord Kinvarra's arm.

The quadrille was over, and it seemed as though they had the middle of the ball-room to themselves. Everyone seemed to be looking at them. All around the wall there were faces looking one way. Delia was only known to our few intimates, and her youth had evidently excited curiosity as well as her beauty. The women looked, too, no doubt, at her exquisite frock, which plainly bore the imprint of Paris. It was a master-piece of elegant simplicity. Her little shoes were covered with pearls. A small pearl-and-diamond star above her forehead shone through her cloudy hair like the evening star seen at dusk.

But more than her beauty, more than her attire, attracted the gaze of the crowd. Lord Kinvarra was looking down at her bright head as though only he and she were there. He wore an air so proud, so possessive, that I understood mother's blush, and blushed in sympathy.

"Lord Kinvarra is making Delia conspicuous," said Elizabeth, coming up to us. "I don't know how she

came to be here; but, since she is here, I think it is rather silly of him."

Mother looked a little scared. . .

"Oh, no, Betty!" I said; "you are looking on at a fairy tale. Don't you see? Delia is Cinderella, Miss Trescott is the Fairy Godmother, we are the Ugly Sisters—"

"But who is the Prince?" said Elizabeth.

"I think," said I, "that Lord Kinvarra must be the Prince."

"Ridiculous!" said Elizabeth.

CHAPTER XIV.

WHO IS IRENE?

AT the close of September came a week of exquisite days, as though the summer were sorry to leave us, and lingered about us with last clinging caresses. It was the second of those days, and the beauty of the sunshine upon the lake and the woods and the mountains made one sad.

"I'm ashamed of myself, that is what I am," said General Benyon, finding me in my garden, "that I haven't given you more help. It's the golf, my dear. It's quite surprising what a hold it lays on a man. I haven't been so well for years; have hardly known what a liver

is. By the way, you have put a different complexion on this wilderness of yours since last I saw it."

"I have had more help," said I modestly.

"Ah! I see you've put on a man," nodding towards his nephew, who had retired to the most distant corner of the garden, and was energetically digging in a bit of waste ground. "I hope he's satisfactory?"

"Very fairly," I said demurely, "except that he keeps rather irregular hours."

"The scoundrel!" cried the general furiously. "I expect he plays on you being a lady. What hour does he come to work?"

"It is often eleven o'clock."

"Eleven o'clock! Infamous! I wish Rashleigh were here. He'd fire a gun off in the fellow's ear at five o'clock in the morning. Get rid of him, my dear; get rid of him; that's my advice."

"But I can't get any other gardener, general."

"Ah, I suppose labour's scarce here. That's a difficulty. Still, a scoundrel like that— Are you very busy, my dear, or could you take me for a walk round the garden?"

I was not very busy, and we set out for a tour of inspection. It was inevitable that sooner or later we should come upon Mr. Dick Benyon at his digging. Well, then the joke would have an end, and I should have to bear the general's reproaches for my foolhardiness in

allowing a breaker of an orchid at five years old to be adrift in my garden.

But when we came to the spot where the gardener had been busy, there was no one there, though I thought I had heard a scurry behind the yew hedge at the moment when the general had stooped to inspect some tuberose under glass.

"Why, where's that fellow? He was here, wasn't he? Bless my soul! what was he doing? He must be the greatest scoundrel unhung. Look here! Instead of doing your work he leaves the spade sticking among a few docks and thistles. Let me see that fellow. I want to give him a bit of my mind."

"So you shall, general, as soon as I can find him," I said, looking about me for the truant.

"Do you know, my dear, looking at the fellow's back, I had a ridiculous idea that he was like my boy Dick?"

"He is not unlike him in build," said I.

"And one day, when I had the honour to call on your mother, I had a wild fancy that I heard Dick's voice out here. Of course, it couldn't be. The fellow'd never have the effrontery to come meddling in your garden, seeing that he's forbidden mine. I don't know how he gets through his days. He's an idle dog is Dick. I dare say now he's as idle as your gardener."

"I shouldn't be surprised," said I.

"But I am surprised, my dear, at the scoundrelism of

this man you've employed, though I've a long experience of gardeners, mind you, and it takes a deal to surprise me. But to think of his taking your wages, and sticking in a corner of your garden digging in the one spot. Now, listen here, my dear, I believe he kept sticking the spade in and out the one hole this last hour."

I heard a sound of subdued merriment behind the yew hedge.

"I shouldn't be surprised," said I.

"You'll get rid of him at once, my dear?"

"I shall let you dismiss him for me, general."

"That I shall do in double-quick time, when I catch him."

"I dare say he's somewhere quite close," said I.

"Skulking?" said the general.

"Very probably. He knows he's been caught."

"I thought the fellow's shoulders had a skulking look," said the general, apparently forgetting that he had said the gardener's back reminded him of his nephew. "I am seldom mistaken, my dear. Now, tell me, has he been doing much damage in your garden? Such a fellow would be sure to, besides wasting time."

"I haven't discovered any," I said. "But then I kept him at elementary tasks—digging and hoeing, and such things."

"Ah, a hewer of wood and drawer of water. That was wise, my dear. Even at a distance I could see he

was a fellow of low intelligence. Well, you couldn't have done much worse, not if you had employed Dick even. That's what happens when a lady has to deal with such fellows unaided. You should have asked me, my dear."

"He wouldn't hear of it."

"Ah, you suggested it? Those fellows never do like to have to deal with a man. They know they'll be unmasked. I'll see that fellow on the tread-mill yet. I could read it in the back of his head. Have you ever studied phrenology, my dear?"

"No, general; it seems a far-reaching subject."

"If you had studied it, my dear; if you had even the remotest idea of physiognomy, you'd never have engaged that man, with his hang-dog visage."

"But you didn't see him, general."

"I could construct his face, my dear, from his head and his shoulders and his back. Commanding men, as I have done, one is obliged to be quick in forming conclusions as to character. Now, I dare say that fellow was very plausible with you. I'd have spotted his character at once. I'd have known as soon as I looked at him that he wasn't to be trusted, that he was a thoroughly worthless character."

"I'm sorry I didn't ask you, general."

"I'm very sorry you didn't, my dear. You'd have saved your money."

"I don't pay him much."

"And your beer. I expect he's always wanting beer."

"He does pretty frequently."

"I thought as much. All his kind do. Never give beer, my dear. It's an abominable liquor. I can't take it myself because of my liver. When I was a young fellow—as young as you, Miss Joan; ah, those were good days!—I drank as much beer as a German student. Now there's nothing I have a greater dislike for. Beer, Miss Joan, is ruinous to the liver, the temper, the figure, the complexion; it's morally bad, too. In fact, there's no evil that one can't put down to it."

"I didn't know it was as bad as that."

"Now, look here, my dear, if I took beer it would go straight to my liver. It would affect my temper. I should become a hot-headed, overbearing, obstinate, self-opinionated old man. That's what I tell my boy Dick. Have you noticed Dick? He's growing as yellow as a guinea."

There was another stir behind the yew hedge.

"You've rats in this garden, my dear. They'll destroy your bulbs."

By this time the general had seated himself in a sunny corner, with rows of scarlet-runner beans about him for a pleasant screen.

"Dick's growing as yellow as a guinea," he repeated. "And he'll have no figure by the time he's forty."

Again there came the warning rustle behind the yew hedge.

"If I had my terrier 'Rats' here, he'd soon make an end of that fellow," said the general. "You're fond of dogs, my dear? I wonder now you haven't a little dog of your own."

"I had one. He died. He was running after me one day when the garden gate clanged to and caught him. He was crushed. I nursed him day and night, but he died—in my lap. I wouldn't have another dog to be hurt like that."

I finished with a dry sob. I don't find it easy to talk about Pat yet.

"There, there," said the general soothingly. "I'm sorry I spoke about it, my dear; but I think you are taking the wrong view. It's selfish not to have another dog. Think of all the dogs in the world that are wanting to love and serve someone like you."

"They wouldn't be like Pat."

"Perhaps not, but they would be a comfort all the same."

"And poor Pat was so jealous, it would break his heart to think I had another dog."

"If he knows anything at all about it now he wouldn't mind that," said the general with an odd seriousness. "What kind of a dog was your Pat, my dear?"

"An Irish terrier."

"They are beautiful creatures, but the Yorkshire terrier is not far behind. Rats is a Yorkshire terrier. His mother, Minx, has a litter of puppies. Would you like one?"

"I never thought of having another dog, but perhaps you are right. I have been so lonely without—Pat. It's lonely walking without a dog, living without a dog, if one has been used to having one."

"You must have one of Minx's puppies. We must talk to Dick about it. There are two dog puppies. I know Irene is to have one, but I am sure Dick will give you the other."

"I shouldn't like to deprive him of it," said I hastily. Who was Irene who was to have the other puppy?

"Never mind that, my dear," the general went on placidly. "Dick wouldn't give you the puppy unless he liked to. I think Dick has enjoyed himself here, though he's probably been having too many pipes and glasses of beer. I don't know that he has, but I should fear it. I wish you had found him some work to do, my dear."

"In my garden?"

The savour of the joke was somewhat diminished for me. I kept wondering all the time who Irene could be. It was strange Mr. Benyon had never mentioned her.

"No, no," chuckled the general, "not even for the sake of Dick's liver would I let him loose in your garden. The boy means well, but he's so con—I beg your pardon,

my dear—I mean so extremely clumsy. He would have been worse than your new gardener. By the way, where's that fellow loafed to?"

"Knocked off work for the day, I expect."

"You don't say so. I'll have a story to tell Rashleigh of the way gardeners work in Ireland. You'd better have had Dick even. 'Twould have stirred up his liver, and saved his complexion. But still, did I ever tell you, my dear, how he broke a most valuable orchid at the age of five?"

"I think you mentioned it, general."

"Well, if he did that at five, what would he do at twenty-five? He's a year or two older than that, by the way. Dick has no harm in him at all, but he's unfortunate. However, about that scoundrel of yours, you'd better let me dismiss him."

"He mightn't go for me."

"He might not. He struck me as being a fellow that it would be a tough job for a lady to tackle. But let him show himself to me, just let him dare show himself to me!"

The general had raised his voice threateningly and glared fiercely all about him, to the amazement of Larry and Joe, whose red heads and solemn wide eyes were lifted in wonder from their work at a little distance away.

"Here I am, uncle," said Mr. Dick Benyon's cheerful

voice, as the gentleman himself stepped from behind the hedge.

The general's eyes twinkled.

"So this is how you have been employing yourself, sir," he said, with pretended heat, "forcing yourself upon a too-confiding young lady who was too kind-hearted to send you about your business."

"I could stand anything but the complexion and the figure," said his nephew. "You know my complexion would stand comparison with anything short of Miss Joan's, and as for my figure, 'tis as good as your own, sir."

"You may preserve it to my age if you'll give up beer and play golf, but you'll never have a figure like mine, Dick."

"Perhaps not, sir. But, I say, sir, what do you mean by playing ducks-and-drakes with my character as you have been doing?"

"Well, you see, Dick, it wasn't you I was abusing, it was Miss Joan's new gardener."

"Yet you dragged me in by the head and shoulders. I'm smarting still, I can tell you."

"How was I to know you were behind the hedge?"

"Skulking."

"Yes, skulking behind the hedge."

"Why, Uncle Bob, I believe you knew it all the time."

CHAPTER XV.

BITTER-SWEET.

GARDENING operations will soon be over," said Mr. Benyon to me a few days later.

"And your occupation will be gone."

"So it is as well I am going away."

"You are going away?" I said, after a second's pause.

"It is sudden, is it not?"

"Summer will not last for ever," he said, and I was conscious he was watching me closely.

I stooped down to pluck up with care some intrusive weeds that the late rains had brought among the violets. I knew my lips quivered and went down at the corners preparatory to tears. It was horrible; but I had never been hurt in all my life without this childish necessity for tears, and he must not see them, he must not see them, even if I had to run away.

"I shall come again," he said, as if he wished to comfort me or himself.

"No two summers are ever the same," said I.

"Next summer will be better."

"We may be dead next summer," I said, with the rash speaking of youth which never really takes death into its calculations.

"Hush, child!" Mr. Benyon said, almost sternly. "What have you at your age to do with death?"

"Well, you had better work while you are here," said I; for I was anxious to get away from him.

"No," he said, "we have worked long enough, true comrades side by side. Come out of this with me, I want to talk."

"Where would you go?" I looked down at my gardening blouse and gloves.

"No further than the lake side. There is a log down by the water-side where we can sit and talk."

His manner was imperative, and I went. A little gate in the yew hedge led into a wood, where a path wandered amid heavy undergrowth to the lake.

We sat down with the water lapping at our feet. The lake spread away all dancing and shimmering till it narrowed in a creek between two purple hills. Beyond were the waters of the Upper Lake.

"It is the day of second crops," said I. "Do you hear the blackbird? And see how heavy that bush is with roses!"

"Are second crops ever the same?" he said.

"In a sense they are dearer," said I, "because there will not be any more."

"When I listened behind the yew hedge the other day, I heard my uncle offer you one of Minx's puppies. I shall send him to you."

I don't know why I said it, but something moved me to add to my thanks, "if Irene does not want it."

"Ah," he said, "Uncle Bob has told you about Irene!"

There was at once relief and disappointment in his voice.

"He only mentioned her as you heard him, 'if Irene does not want it'."

"Irene has a way of wanting most things," he said, grimly, "but she sha'n't have the puppy."

"Who is Irene?"

"She is, if she wills it—the future Mrs. Dick Benyon."

My heart seemed to stop beating; then it dropped lower than a plummet of lead. I bent down and pulled a seeding blade of grass and examined it curiously.

"I congratulate you," I said. My voice sounded in my ears as if I heard someone else speaking.

"Don't!" he said. "I am the least to be congratulated man in all the world."

I looked up at him then. He was staring straight before him, and his eyes were angry and miserable.

"I am sorry," I said, forgetting myself for the moment.

"I don't know why women should be such angels," he said, getting up and walking about as if he could hardly endure the narrow space. After a minute he looked at me, and our eyes met, as though a world lay between us.

"I ought to tell you something about it," he said, "or you will think—what I cannot bear you to think.

Irene is Miss Champion, the daughter of a lady my uncle was in love with when he was a young man. His dearest friend fell in love with her also, and married her. My uncle never married, as you know. Yet he and Mr. Champion are still the dearest of friends. Of course there was a long parting between them, but that was only because Uncle Bob was in India. You would hardly believe any man could be so loyal, and simple, unless you knew Uncle Bob. He thought the best man had won, and he accepted the lady's decision."

"I hope she was worth such a feeling."

"Mrs. Champion? Irene will be exactly like her at her age. There are people who get the best of everything in the world without giving very much. One of them is—Mrs. Champion."

"They never found out, I suppose? I mean those two who cared for her."

"I should think Champion found out; Uncle Bob never would. I'm going to show you Irene's photograph. Perhaps you will understand then."

He took a case from his breast-pocket and handed it to me silently. I looked at it also in silence.

"Well?"

"She is very handsome."

"What else, Joan?"

"She looks proud, and—and cold."

"She is cold. Time was when I saw nothing but her

beauty. I saw her with Uncle Bob's eyes. He sees her only beautiful still."

"But you are engaged to her?"

"I am as much as I can be, seeing that she is not engaged to me. Was ever such a bargain? Since I was a little boy, and she a tall, scornful child in short frocks, I have been hers to take or leave."

"It is not equitable," I said, plucking the airy fountain of the seeded grass to pieces.

"It is not. But Irene does not think of other people's rights. She is an only daughter. She cannot leave her father and mother, she says. My uncle worships her, and points out to me that a good daughter makes a good wife. I am hers to take when she will, if she will."

"And your uncle is satisfied?"

"Irene is Mrs. Champion over again; she has no fault in my uncle's eyes. If she jilts me one of these days he will pity me, believing that once more the best man has won."

"Why did you do it?"

"I, too, was under Irene's spell once. Once I was only too happy to wait; now I am tired of waiting. My heart has come to its second crop, and second crops are best. This will be—the last."

I said nothing, only gazed away to where a cloud torn in pieces trailed its fine tatters about purple Muckanish.

"What am I to do, Joan?"

"Is it for me to tell you?"

"I am going to tell Irene that she has worn me out."

"If there were no other girl in the world that would be still right."

"My wise Joan!"

"What will she say?"

"She may elect to keep me. It is Irene's way to value things beyond her reach."

"And then?"

"Then, Joan, it is extremely likely that my uncle may quarrel with me. He loves me, but he has always expected me to marry Irene. If the arrangement is broken, not by her, but by me, he may think it dishonourable. To think that would kill his love."

"And then?"

"I shall go out in the world at twenty-eight, with hands unused to work and the training of an idle man."

"Your uncle would not be so unjust."

"He is hot-tempered. If he thought I had played fast and loose with Irene, I have little doubt that he would bid me begone. Then, being his nephew, I should probably go. It might not be so easy to restore the old order of things. All that is—if Irene wills it."

"If she wants to keep you, are you sure you will not be willing?"

"I am sure of it, Joan. I have been a fool, but I have acted in good faith. Even after I had ceased to care

whether Irene made up her mind or not, it still seemed worth while to wear her bonds since it made my uncle happy."

"It was a false idea. And how could he accept it, seeing he loved you? He should have thought of you."

"He did think of me. You see he never doubts Irene. To him it has always been an engagement, though she would have nothing made public, and was ever ready with excuses for pushing away any question of our marriage. And Irene is the queen of women to him. He would give up everything to her if she would only consent to rule Hawk's Nest. She has no idea of the depths of generous attachment he has for her. She could not fathom them."

I began to feel towards the old general, who had always been kind to me, as I should feel towards an enemy.

"Are you angry with me, Joan?" Mr. Benyon asked.

"No, I am not angry."

"I ought to have done with this before—before I let anyone else see I cared for them; ought I not?"

"In strict rightness you ought. We do not always act up to the highest standard."

"If my uncle is angry with me I shall come back a poor man."

"The great thing for—anyone who cared for you, would be that you should come back."

"Ah, Joan! but I have made a horrible mess of it."

I hope Irene will let me go; not because I mind the loss of money for myself, but it would make things easier. And if I have to hurt Uncle Bob, someone must make up to me for it, Joan."

A few days later our guests were reduced to Miss Trescott and Mr. Thorneycroft, and the place was very lonely and strange. Mr. Thorneycroft after all made no such masculine stir in the house as we had grown used to; and without General Benyon and his nephew the place seemed as quiet as it was before we had ever entertained the project of receiving strangers into our home.

Winter seemed to descend upon us suddenly, locking our country of wood and water, lonely bogland and purple mountain, away from the world, which had sought us when summer was here.

I became selfishly absorbed in my own affairs, practically to the exclusion of all else. I liked to be alone. The garden and my poultry-yard made my excuse, for, in this mild country, gardening operations need not be finished because winter had set in. Even the hubbub about Delia moved me hardly more than if it were not Delia, but some other girl who had been so lucky. If Delia had been unlucky I could have taken her to my heart.

For Lord Kinvarra had, as Madge O'Hara put it, "rushed the pace". He had come walking in the day after the ball and demanded his Cinderella. He was

indeed handsome and romantic enough to flutter the heart of any little home-bird of a Cinderella, and fortunately for my little sister he was true as well.

Mother had received him alone; had had to decide things for herself. No Elizabeth by her side to suggest that the engagement must wait, since the child could not possibly know her own mind, and she was over-young for loving and marrying.

Mother, indeed, had stammered out that she was too young.

"I will wait a year for the marriage," said Lord Kinvarra. "I know it is usual for girls to marry later nowadays, but my mother and my grandmother were brides at Delia's age, and the world was none the worse. My own dear mother was young enough to play with me before she received the injury that made her an invalid. I will wait a year, but it must be an engagement."

"I was not eighteen when I was married," said mother. "Perhaps we were older then. Delia seems such a baby."

"I shall know how to take care of her," said the lover.

He swept mother off her feet. She said afterwards, with wet eyes, that it was like the Golden Age come on earth again. He had saved all his love for Delia, and brought a fresh heart to her; and it was pretty to see them together with his exquisite air of reverence and protection for his young love.



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"STILL DANCING WITH TOM CROSBY"



Delia could very well be let alone. I took to walking, long lonely walks by myself. I struck up a firm friendship with Georgie O'Hara, who would ride over to lunch sometimes, spend the afternoon with me walking, or sitting before a little fire hastily improvised in my room, and then gallop home in time for dinner.

Mother had lost her perturbations about the O'Hara girls. They were slangy, and a little mannish, and always would be, but as they came oftener, she grew to recognize the wholesomeness and sweetness of those daughters of the open air.

Georgie, too, was just a little older and quieter since Tom Crosby had gone to Khansore. The last I had seen of the old careless Georgie was the morning of the ball, when the light began to struggle through the five long windows overlooking the verandah, and she had passed me, still dancing with Tom Crosby, and looking happy and miserable, excited and despairing, all at once.

"My one good night is over," she had whispered to me as she ran upstairs to the dressing-room for her cloak, passing me on her way. "My one good night, and Tom doesn't understand a bit that it is killing me for him to go."

• Dear Georgie, she took her killing well. A few shadows about her bright eyes, a laugh that was less ready and less frequent. She did not pretend not to miss her friend: but yet, though she had talked of killing,

she did not trouble the lives of others with her personal sorrow.

"Georgie is game," said her father to me one Saturday when Miss Trescott and I had driven to a meet of the Blazers in our rickety old phaeton. "Georgie is game," he said, as his daughter, on a beautiful satin-skinned mare, sat receiving the compliments of the master on her riding the last hunting-day.

"She is, indeed," I said; and I think he felt the heart in my words.

We did our moping, Georgie and I, together. Georgie always brought me the latest news from Khansore, where the new Master of Horse to the Rajah was sick for white faces. Not that Tom Crosby said so. Only we read it between the lines of his letters, and by the aid of the enormous journeys he seemed to undertake for the pleasure of smoking a pipe with some Britisher as lonely as himself.

He was *persona grata* with the Rajah, who had not only doubled his salary, but had given him some enormous presents out of his admiration for Tom's skill in steeple-chasing, a new form of sport which the Master of Horse had introduced in Khansore.

Tom wrote with the regularity of a husband to a wife; though his letters only began with "Dear Georgie", and ended with "yours sincerely". Tom's spelling, by the way, was delicious if one only had had heart to laugh.

"I'll tell you what," said Georgie, one day "when December smelt like May"; "Tom's piling up money-bags. He's the frugallest creature alive. Spends nothing but what he gives away. Some day he'll find out that he misses dear Georgie more than he thought possible. And he'll count over his savings and wonder if they're equal to my thousand quid a-year. If he thinks they are he'll come home. If not, he'll wait a little longer, and turn up some day as yellow as a China orange, and find me with crows'-feet about my eyes and gray hairs in my head. But what matter if he comes at last!"

But I had not the consolation of letters, even dry, friendly letters like Tom's. To me no word came at all: and it is hard living on hope which has nothing to feed upon.

I had no confidence to give Georgie in return for hers. She knew what was to be known, and I could see that she kept hoping every time we met that I should tell her a letter had come.

But except for a box of Riviera roses at Christmas-time there was never a sign, and if roses came for me, there were violets for mother, and lilies for Elizabeth, and lilies of the valley for Delia. Not to be forgotten counted for less when everyone was remembered.

Sometimes I could reach the heights of Georgie's simple faith.

"Because you know, Joan," she said, "God helps us

when we run straight and try to do nothing we need ever be ashamed of. But I don't believe He would let us, who try to follow the best He has put in us, love anyone very unworthy. For that would be the saddest thing of all. One doesn't mind suffering for someone one knows to be decent and good, even if one has to go without them."

But not always. There were times my heart was heavy with the dread that I should never again see or hear of Mr. Benyon. What more likely than that he should take the easy course and marry the girl his uncle wished him to. If he had loved her before he saw me he might love her afterwards. Indeed, might it not have been anger at her coldness that brought him to me.

With such thoughts I vexed myself. And I wondered too why he had come to be on the Riviera at Christmas, since I knew they had meant to stay the winter in Sussex. It was of no use to comfort myself with the thought that Irene was not with them, since I could not know, but still I did comfort myself so.

CHAPTER XVI.

ELIZABETH'S PLOT.

NEXT winter," said Elizabeth, "as soon as Delia is married, we will have the house full. Of course we want to be quiet for the wedding. There is some-

thing slightly incongruous about a lord's mother-in-law receiving paying guests. So I shall send out my circulars for the winter season beginning first of October."

I had not lost my old childish admiration of Elizabeth, but in the trouble that had come on me I had seemed to shrink from my brilliant and confident elder sister. One could not imagine Elizabeth the heroine of an unhappy love-story. If it ever came to her to love and marry she would be sure to do it with the utmost *éclat*, and amid the plaudits of her circle. No, Georgie O'Hara suited me better, or poor Margaret Synnott, whose love-story was over long ago, and who received my overtures now with some surprise, since she could not possibly guess at the cause of them. Even little Kitty, who was polishing the oak staircase as I went down it one day, with traces of tears on her cheek, was more my sister in the spirit in those days.

"Well, Kitty," I said, pausing to speak to her, "I hope there's good news from America."

"There's no news at all," she answered despondently. "An' my match is to be made at Shrove."

"Oh, Kitty, I hoped all that was off!"

"It isn't, then, Miss Joan, it's on. Ould Paddy O'Keeffe is more determined to have me than ever. Sure he's dazzled my poor ould father, the ould villin, wid his bank-book an' his jauntin'-car an' his best parlour. Much comfort his wife got out of them, the poor woman

that's gone; may the heavens be her bed! Och, why didn't she stay where she was?"

I was obliged to smile at Kitty's speech, though her feeling was tragic enough.

"You should get a rhyme made upon him, Kitty," I said, "such as Hanrahan the Red made upon the old man that wanted to marry the young woman. He'd wither away under the scorn of the poet."

"Och, it isn't withering, ould Paddy 'ud be. He'd thrive, never fear. Poor 'Statia, the poor woman that everyone had a good word for, is gone, an' ould Paddy's wantin' a young wife. Och, why did she rise out of it? Or if she must be goin', why didn't she take Paddy wid her not to be an annoyance to people?"

"Are you going to let them make your match, Kitty?"

"They've tired me out, so they have, Miss Joan, an' there's nayther tale nor tidin's of Larry since Michael-mas all but a week. I'm so worn out waitin' that I've lost the spirit to fight about it, so they'll make my match at Shrove."

"Oh, Kitty, they couldn't marry you to that old man, especially when you've given your word to another."

She looked at me with the tears standing in her eyes, and her face suddenly frozen.

"'Tisn't much they'd stop at in the way of match-makin'. There's little Miss Eileen Gow, the farmer's daughter. You'll remember that they took her out of

her convent school an' married her, like as if they wor sellin' a calf, to ould Mick Casey that has the shop in Gortnalea, an' is as rich as Croshus."

"I remember," said I. "It was a shameful marriage."

"She's out of it now," said Kitty, "the poor little soft innocent crathur that was born to trouble. She's dead, Miss Joan."

"Dead! poor little thing!" I cried, much shocked, for I had known Eileen a little fair school-girl in her scarlet cloak trotting to and fro demurely to the convent school in all manner of weathers.

"Aye; she'll be glad to be where there's nayther marryin' nor givin' in marriage, God help her. 'Tis a terrible thing the way people do be makin' matches for people that ought never be married at all. An' oftentimes your own father and mother the worst."

"They're used to it. They don't see the cruelty of it, Kitty."

"Aye, I suppose that'll be it. The ould forgets the way they felt when they wor young. An' sure they had their own matches med for them. Not that I have any right to spake against the poor ould mother of me. Her heart's wid me, but she's terrible afeard of my father. 'Tis she has got me the long day to Shrove."

"You've written to Larry, Kitty?"

"My letters has come back. Sometimes my mind misgives me Larry's dead. He'd never lave me widout

a letter all that time an' he knowin' I'm as scary as a bird that you ketch in your hand. Anyhow, if he doesn't come for me, I'm to be married at Shrove."

"Oh, Kitty, someone must interfere! Can't mother do something? Your family has always lived under the Burkes."

"Miss Joan, the priest himself can't break the customs. Didn't you hear that Father Philip cried the day he married little Miss Eileen to ould Casey? 'Twould be no use her ladyship interferin' at all."

"Something will happen. Larry will come back."

"God send it! Even if I knew he was alive I'd have the heart to hold out; but I think he's dead, though if he is the quare thing 'ud be that he hasn't appeared to me. I wonder he'd be happy anywhere knowin' that I was so heart-sick for a sight of him."

"What does Nuala say?"

"She bids me hold out, but I haven't the sperit, Miss Joan. Look you here, now, 'tis killin' me they are. Sure my breath's gone as short, an' look at my hand—wasted it is."

"You're not looking well, indeed, Kitty. But I think it is worse than folly of you to give in."

"Och sure, if Larry's left me—'tis dead he'll be, for he'd never look at another girl—I might as well be plazin' the ould people. 'Tisn't long Paddy O'Keeffe'll have me any way, I'm thinkin'."

At this moment Elizabeth came up the stairs and claimed me in the imperious way we none of us thought of disputing.

I wasn't satisfied to leave Kitty at this point, but after all, the staircase wasn't the place for discussing such serious matters, so I went with Elizabeth.

She led me to her office, that had once been papa's. I could see that she was excited about something, for her eyes gleamed, and when she had shut the door and pushed me into a chair, she began walking up and down with her hands clasped behind her back.

"The post has just come, Joan," she began.

"Anything for me?" I asked lightly; but my heart sprang up with the sudden irrational throb with which it had leaped, only to sink again, every day the post had come those three months back.

"There is nothing for you, Joan"—as if I had not known it all the time,—“but there is something for me.”

"What, Betty?"

"What do you think, Joan. I have done a very daring thing, and it has come off, and now I am rather alarmed."

"You don't look very much alarmed."

"No, I suppose I'm not." Her laugh was one of excitement and pleasure. "Think of the most unlikely person in the world to have for a guest."

"My mind is not elastic enough, Betty."

"Ah, *I* should have guessed at once. Uncle Peter Burton."

"Uncle Peter Burton!" I repeated in bewilderment.

"You may well be surprised. It was my audacity brought it about. Now I shall have to keep up the illusion."

"What illusion?"

"That we are Franklins, and not Burkes."

"He does not know, then, where he is coming to?"

"Do you think he would come if he did? Frankly, Joan, it was partly because of this scheme that I suggested dropping our names, though it was mother's dislike of dragging father's name in the dust, as she took it, that gave me the chance. I sent him a very prettily worded circular five months ago, but I had long given up hope that anything would come of it."

"You think he would not come if he knew?"

"I am sure he is an obstinate old man; but our anonymity builds a bridge for his obstinacy. I am going to do my best to charm him."

"To what end, Betty?"

"Not because of his money-bags, Joan," with a toss of her satin-smooth head.

"I didn't suppose it, Betty. Money is not a commodity the Burkes are very keen after, or very likely ever to possess. Why, then?"

"Because Uncle Peter is on my mind, a poor, sulky

old bear in his den, with only his valet to look after him."

"How do you know? He has had years in which to form other ties. It is not likely with all his money that he need go without sympathy."

"Why, Joan, you grow cynical! But I am sure he is still alone. He loved papa intensely; I know that much. If papa had been a woman instead of a man he would have kept friends with Uncle Peter, and had his will all the time."

"Yes, I suppose men's quarrels are sharp and bitter."

"The meeting of two thunder-clouds. Crash! and they rush away from each other. And the dearer they are the bitterer the quarrel."

"But why this sudden sympathy for Uncle Peter?"

"He is of our blood."

"He has forgotten it long enough."

"Besides, I can understand. I hate people to oppose me."

"What will mother say? She won't like it."

"He is coming, and he must not be driven away by any premature disclosure of who we are. We must persuade mother to be silent."

"It will be difficult."

"Leave it to me."

"Someone will betray you."

"I think not. I shall speak to Nuala, and to our other

guests if necessary, but I imagine it will hardly be necessary. Depend upon it, Uncle Peter will keep himself to himself, as the people say. He has the habit of solitude."

"A grumpy old invalid."

"Hardly that, Joan," and Elizabeth laughed exultantly. "He will be by far the best-paying of our paying guests. He brings a groom as well as a valet, and three hunters. He comes for the hunting, for a month probably, he says."

"Well, you must see after this—Nabob. He will probably be horribly dissatisfied with everything."

"I don't think he will be, Joan. So long as a hunting man is called in good time in the morning, and gets plenty of plain, wholesome food, he is satisfied. It is your chimney-corner man that is a grumbler. Besides, he will be out three days in the week."

"He will want all sorts of things done for him. Who is going to see about his boots and all that in a way to please him? Jim will never be up to his ideal."

"You forget he has his valet, Joan. It is his valet who will get a boot at his head if it isn't dubbed properly, not poor Jim."

"Those servants will make horrible work downstairs."

"You Cassandra!" cried Elizabeth, in too high spirits to be daunted by me. "What can they do? If they were women servants they would quarrel, doubtless; as

it is, they may lose their hearts to Kitty or Rose, but Nuala will see that they do it decorously."

"Poor Kitty, I almost wish she would lose her heart to one of them, that is, if he is a good sort, and if Larry does not turn up."

"What is the matter with Kitty? And who is Larry, Joan? Little Kitty has not been looking well. What were you talking to her about on the stairs just now?"

I told her of poor Kitty's trouble, and Elizabeth's eyes flashed. I have not made you understand Elizabeth at all if you do not realize that she is extremely generous. She looked splendid now, as she vowed that the sacrifice of Kitty should not be accomplished, not if the girl had to be kidnapped to save her.

"Alas," said I sorrowfully, "if Kitty's faint-heartedness is against us, what is to be done?"

"Couldn't we buy off the parents; give Kitty a portion?"

"You would only make her a more desirable match for old O'Keeffe; and Tom Sweeney would be looking higher than ever for his girl. Kitty is not likely to find another suitor with the social pretensions of this one. Besides, you have no money."

"Sure enough, I haven't," said Elizabeth, laughing. "But I think Miss Trescott would help us. Or couldn't we terrorize Tom Sweeney? He hasn't paid a penny rent for the past five years."

"It is of no use meddling with the customs, as Kitty says herself; you would have the country in arms against you. 'See how well it works,' they say; 'it is only when people fall in love that the trouble begins.' And they are right in their way. The marriages work well enough, except when someone is foolish enough to die of a match-making."

"We shall save Kitty somehow," said Elizabeth cheerfully, "even if I have to put down nobles against Pat O'Keeffe, like the blind beggar of Bethnal Green. Only my nobles shall go on the side of the poor suitor, Larry, or whatever you call him. Anyhow, there is time for a thousand things to happen between now and Shrove. Five long weeks away it is."

"If Larry can be found, Kitty will put herself in our hands. Without that deadly resignation of hers all would be well. By the way, Betty, have you thought that the servants will certainly betray our identity, and our real names will filter to Uncle Peter through his valet?"

"Before I am ready? I have thought of that."

"Well?"

"Uncle Peter's servants won't know a word of what Kitty and Rose are saying, any more than the girls will understand their fine English accents. Do you remember when we passed through London, on our way to school, we had to spell our names when there was a parcel to be sent."

"I doubt they'll find some way of communicating," I said drily. "Then probably Uncle Peter will never forgive your deception when he finds it out."

"Uncle Peter will forgive me anything and everything," smiled Elizabeth. "You will see, Madam Faint-Heart, you will see."

CHAPTER XVII.

THICKER THAN WATER.

POOR mother turned nearly as pale as the muslin fichu about her shoulders when she heard that Uncle Peter was coming. She had forgiven his harshness to his nephew, because of her, long ago. Was it not her creed, which she lived up to, to forgive as she hoped to be forgiven? She had forgiven him the loss of Derry-more, which she loved. Though she did not believe it, I think she had come to love Ardeelish, where her children were born and our father died, with as great a love. But she had a fear of the old man who had proved so implacable. And so many memories were associated with him that we did not wonder she turned pale.

The manner of his coming added to her trouble. She felt the thing savoured of deceit, and her whole candid nature revolted against it. But Miss Trescott, whose interest Elizabeth had enlisted, presented the matter to

her from another aspect. To Miss Trescott's shrewd, somewhat worldly mind, there was nothing unjustifiable in our receiving Uncle Peter under an assumed name.

"For he would probably not come," she said, "if he knew where he was coming to. And to my mind, it seems that the man must be hankering after his own flesh and blood, else he would not set foot in the country at all. The Melton or the Quorn ought to be more his fit at his age than scampering over bogs and stone walls at the heels of the Blazers, let alone coming into a country where, as every Englishman knows"—her eyes twinkled—"you have to wear a coat-of-mail for fear of being shot at from behind hedges. Believe me, my dear, the man comes to Ardeelish because that other place—what is its name?—Derrymore—is in the same county."

"I hadn't thought of that," said mother. "You really think it may be so, dear friend? We know so little of the world."

"I am sure of it," said Miss Trescott. "You just leave this very capable girl of yours to look after your affairs and her own. You'll see the old man will thank her one of these days for what she has done."

So mother's fears were allayed, and Elizabeth set about joyously making preparations for the housing of Uncle Peter, his hunters, and his men.

Of course Nuala had to be taken into our confidence, and Nuala, though she had abused Uncle Peter when

there seemed no prospect that we should ever see him, now made such a *volte face* as might be expected of her.

"Sure, the poor ould gintleman," she said effusively, "he'll be as welcome as flowers in May! And where would he go to, now 'tis time for him to be makin' his sowl, but to his own people, to be in peace and quietness?"

"I don't think he's thinking of making his soul, Nuala," laughed Elizabeth, "for he's coming to hunt with the Blazers, and bringing three hunters and a groom, as well as his valet—"

"And why not?" said Nuala. "I expect he's a younger man than many a man that's half his age. Only, goodness grant he won't be steeple-chasin' into the next world—not, at laste, till things is right betune yez! Three hunters in them mouldy ould stables! 'Twill be like ould times, when the Burkes lived as they ought, an' as they will again, thanks to ould Mr. Peter."

"You're romancing, as usual, Nuala."

"Whethen, 'tis little romance is in it that th' ould gentleman 'ud lave his money where he has a right to. Och, bedad, if I thought he'd do anything else, 'tis in the Red Room I'd put him, where there's a loose lath in the bed, let alone the ghost of Rody the Foxhunter hants it at night."

"I want Uncle Peter very well treated, Nuala," said Elizabeth persuasively.

It would be a serious matter if Nuala took it into her head he was not to be.

Nuala's answer relieved us.

"Why wouldn't he be well trated, an' he wan o' the family? 'Tis different them strangers comin' into it—not that I mind them we has now. Mr. Peter'll have the Blue Bedroom, wid the new spring mattress to the bed. Heaven be wid the time the gentry was all for feathers! Now you might as well ask them to sleep wid the pig as on the finest of goose-down. I know Mr. Peter's ways. I know the things he liked to see on the table. Wasn't I kitchen-maid then at Derrymore, under ould Mrs. Ahern, the cook? She'd as soon fling the fish-kettle at you as look at you, when she was roused, but a nice, quiet, sinsible woman if you didn't cross her. A dish of mutton collops was Mr. Peter's delight."

"Don't betray yourself if you should chance to meet him, Nuala," said Elizabeth. "He's not to know he's in the house of a Burke at all."

"I hope I knows my place better, Miss Bet, nor to go forcin' my acquaintance on quality, let alone that bein' but a young kitchen-maid in them days, 'tisin't likely there'd be more thin a seein' acquaintance between me an' him," said Nuala, with some offence.

"I was only afraid he might remember those excellent collops," said Elizabeth hastily. "You see, it isn't an Irish dish, Nuala, and he might begin to wonder how we knew his taste."

"If that's all, sorra the collop he'll get while he's

here; only Irish stew and boiled mutton, that he hated to see on the table, as I remember your grandmother tellin' Mrs. Ahern."

"Oh, you needn't rush in the opposite extreme," said Elizabeth laughing, "or Uncle Peter will leave his money to found a Dogs' Home!"

"That reminds me o' the big kitchen at Derrymore. You couldn't move a step widout fallin' over a dog or a beggar. Ah, that was the fine, plentiful house! You couldn't put a thing out o' your hand that a dog wouldn't gobble it. Maybe it was by rayson of that that Mrs. Ahern—may her soul be in glory!—was so handy at firin' the things about. I often wish them days was back. Many a belt wid a rollin'-pin I got in mistake for a dog. Kind her ladyship was. She had the paddock full of ould horses, a-past their work, that was callin' out for somewan to put an ind to them. She'd give anything to a sick baste. It made the poor people talk, for they don't like to see things that's good for Christians given to the baste. Not that they'd any right to be talkin'. She had as many ould good-for-nothin' human pin-sioners as four-legged ones."

At this point Nuala broke off hastily with a remembrance of something left undone, and a parting assurance that the servants wouldn't talk, because if she found one of them as much as looking crooked at Mr. Burton's servants, she'd tell them to take their boxes on the spot.

I went into the Blue Room the morning of the day Uncle Peter was to come. It was a warm, damp winter day, but the grate had a roaring wood fire, and there was a pleasant smell of linen airing. Rose and Kitty had been busy at the room all the day before, and it was fragrant of cleanliness. The old blue-and-white damask with which it was hung looked cool and clean, but the thing that arrested my eye was a bowl of monthly roses, which blossom all the year round in our mild climate, on the toilet-table.

It must have been Elizabeth's thought, and it made me smile. I imagined Uncle Peter, who, to my mind, must possess the visage of an ogre, looking in the glass at himself across the bowl of roses. It was very odd of Elizabeth, who was not given to being of a sentimental turn of mind, but I could see that the thought of Uncle Peter engrossed her, as other girls are engrossed by the thought of lovers, or a career, or an ideal of duty.

Going downstairs, I paused at a window which overlooked the courtyard. Looking down, because of the unusual clatter of horses' feet, I saw that Uncle Peter's horses had come. They had walked from Carnaross, and the groom was paying the country lads who had led two of them for him. He was holding the bridle-reins of the three in his hands, and Jim stood by, ready to show him their stalls.

They were beautiful creatures, glossy as satin, and even after their long journey fuming with fire and energy.

Certainly they brought a stir of life into the courtyard, with its vast range of outbuildings for which the present owners had so little use. One could imagine now the ancient glories, when, as the country-people said, the coaches-and-four used to roll into that courtyard, bringing ladies and gentlemen to the dinner-parties and assemblies and balls. We had never known Ardeelish except shorn of its ancient glories and partially ruined. Like many another house of the gentry, it had lain long uninhabited before papa, being obliged to give up Derrymore and its appurtenances, had rented Ardeelish for a song.

At lunch we all wore a subdued air of excitement—all except Delia, whose one daily and all-sufficing excitement was her *fiancé's* visit; and Mr. Thorneycroft, who had come in from a long walk with his friend, the rector, and who knew nothing yet about the new arrival. He was not likely to converse much with Uncle Peter, nor to discuss our affairs if he did.

"What has happened?" he said, smiling at us.

"Only that a new guest is coming to-day—a Mr. Burton from Lancashire. His horses have come before him," answered Elizabeth. "I have been out to see them. They are beauties. Which do you like best, Joan?"

"The flea-bitten gray, I think. He is so gentle. He ate an apple from my hand."

"They are not as pretty as my Rory," put in Delia. "Great tall things that you would need a ladder to mount."

Rory was a little Connemara pony, one of Lord Kinvarra's gifts to his betrothed; a wild, shy, lovely little creature, with bright eyes looking through a shaggy mane, and an almost superhuman intelligence.

"I dare say Rory is best for you," I said; "but fancy Uncle Peter on Rory!"

"Joan, if you are going to begin like that," said Elizabeth; but I had already blushed over my indiscretion.

However, Mr. Thorneycroft, who was as little given to hearing what was going on about him as Delia's self, made a diversion by remarking that he was going with Lord Kinvarra to Spiddal Fair on Saturday.

"For what?" asked Elizabeth, in her direct way.

"To see an Irish horse-fair in the first place. In the second, Kinvarra talked of picking up a companion to Rory, for a lady's phaeton, I think he said. In the third, I may treat myself to one of the little beasts if I see one I like."

"Not to ride?" said Miss Trescott. "You wouldn't get one up to your weight."

I didn't think of it. This is for a lady."

He blushed in a deprecating way, and we all looked at each other. I think we should have liked to know more about the romance indicated in Mr. Thorneycroft's speech and blush.

Our visitors always arrive about the hour of afternoon tea. I came in late. There seemed a good many people in the room. In the window-seat nearest the door Lord Kinvarra and Mr. Thorneycroft, who were great friends, were having an amicable wrangle over the foreign policy of the government. Delia was listening with an enchanted smile on her face; her lover, who was for the Imperial policy, was apparently getting the best of it. Mr. Thorneycroft, like many Englishmen, was quixotic in his views. The argument was safe to last for a long time once it was started. Man-like, those two friends enjoyed nothing better than a hotly contested argument over which they could sit up all night and begin again as fresh as ever the next. To me it seemed rather futile, since neither could ever hope to persuade the other; but I have the true feminine impatience of debate for its own sake, and always keep silence or get cross when I find anyone who does not agree with me. It was fortunate for Delia's future happiness that she could be so delighted with her lord's prowess in debate.

Further on Mrs. Langrishe and mother sat side by side on the sofa. Since the summer visitors had gone, we

had ceased to withdraw ourselves so much into the west wing.

Then I came to the new arrival, who stood straddling the hearth-rug with his back to the blaze, and his head bent, listening with an air of obvious pleasure to Elizabeth's chatter.

My sister was dispensing tea at a daintily-spread tea-table. Her godmother, who had, I fancied, taken it somewhat to heart that her kinsman should have preferred Delia to Elizabeth, had lately asserted the godmother's privilege, and had insisted on dressing her goddaughter. So Elizabeth no longer lacked fine feathers to set off her beauty, and arrayed as befitted her, she made the rest of us look dowdy.

She was wearing a tea-gown of soft dull pink, with a little white chiffon at the neck and wrists. It became her dark beauty perfectly, and in the light of the wood fire, with the great room full of shadows, except where the leaping firelight at either end illuminated its dark-nesses, she made a central glow of colour.

Uncle Peter was quite unlike my preconceived idea of him. He was a fresh-coloured elderly gentleman, with dark hair thickly streaked with gray, and bright dark eyes under rather bushy eyebrows. He looked opinionated and obstinate certainly; but is that not the way of elderly gentlemen? and in spite of Elizabeth's romantic picture of his loneliness, he looked extremely prosperous.

He was dressed in a Norfolk jacket and knickerbockers of warm-coloured gray homespun, and his presence in the room brought into it a pleasant suggestion of open-air life and country pursuits.

I glided into a low seat close by mother's sofa, and looked at him and Elizabeth out of my safe obscurity. Her face was lifted to his; his, bent to her, had a curious look of wistful scrutiny, as if he were trying to remember something. I had a mind to call out to him: "It is your own face in the glass that she reminds you of." Why, they were as much alike as father and daughter.

I wondered if anyone else had seen the likeness. No one seemed to be observing it now at all events, and I could hardly keep my eyes from the couple. I was fascinated to see how the resemblance came out startlingly close in face and gesture. Watching them, I felt that everyone must see it. But perhaps Uncle Peter, after all, would be the last person to discover it.

Mother, I thought, looked a little pale. I was glad she had her friend by her side to hold her in quiet talk. Mrs. Langrishe knew of what she called Elizabeth's masquerade, as did Lord Kinvarra, and was keenly interested in the result. She, too, seemed to think all fair in this game of love. It really was love was in Elizabeth's thought, with just a little spice of strategy thrown in.

"Where is Miss Trescott?" I asked.

"She offered to walk a little way with Margaret Synnott as she was going home," mother replied; "and that reminds me," she added contritely, "that I said I would ask Mr. Thorneycroft to walk some way to meet her as she came back."

"I will tell him," I said, jumping up. Uncle Peter had just handed me my tea without looking at me; he was so taken up with Elizabeth.

I put down the tea-cup, and summoned Mr. Thorneycroft from his argument.

"Will you walk a little way with me to meet Miss Tresecott?" I asked him.

His face beamed.

"Delighted, Miss Joan," he replied. "We shall have to finish to-morrow night, Kinvarra."

It had become a regular thing for Mr. Thorneycroft to keep Lord Kinvarra company in his big lonely house, often for two or three days at a time.

So we went out together into the dusky evening.

CHAPTER XVIII.

FRIENDS IN COUNCIL.

AS we went across the bog road the sun was setting, a fierce eye of white gold surrounded by a dazzling fringe of rays under a canopy of purple that was the



N° 30

"WE WENT OUT TOGETHER INTO THE DUSKY EVENING"



night. All the bog-holes were gleaming and glancing now in his white light. In a few minutes he would be gone, and the place for anyone not well used to it, and of excellent eyesight, would be somewhat dangerous.

As we went I shaded my eyes with my hand and peered across the long dwindling causeway.

"If we should meet Blake's cows coming home now, and they were unmannerly inclined, they might elbow us into the bog. There is no sign of her coming."

"What matter? The walking is pleasant, and that pale sky-line will stand to us till the moon rises. I think I see either the moon or a rick on fire somewhere down yonder."

He pointed to a growing radiance behind a distant belt of woods.

"It is the moon," I said. "We shall have plenty of light."

"And as for Blake's cows," Mr. Thorneycroft added, "Grip would soon turn them into the bog. Wouldn't you, Grip, old fellow?"

Grip's sagacious little yellow face looked up at us, while he wagged his tail for answer. In the week following New Year, just after the matter of Uncle Peter's visit had been mooted, Grip had come, without a word to say who had sent him.

Well, he had already found his way into my heart. He was a puppy of infinite spirit, and looked, as his

Irish cousins do, already very old, albeit on a long walk his spirit would give out, and he would worry my frock with babyish bleatings that meant his small paws had wearied and he could walk no further. No matter how things were I was glad that Irene had not Grip, with so much else.

I supposed that Mr. Benyon had returned to England, since Grip had come, or possibly it might be that he had left orders before going to the Riviera that the puppy was to be sent to me as soon as he was fit to travel. But all these things must be matter of conjecture since no letter had come.

"What do you think of the new arrival?" I asked Mr. Thorneycroft.

"He seems all right, looks a sportsman and a gentleman. But to tell you the truth, Miss Joan, I haven't thought about him."

"You were too much taken up with your argument. You men worry over those things as a dog does over a bone."

"And can put them away and pick them up again a few days later with just as much zest."

"That is one of the vital differences between men and women. It is only the unusually constituted woman who can pretend to like a troublesome thing that leads to nothing."

"Let us have our little foibles, Miss Joan!"

It was wonderful how bright and bold Mr. Thorneycroft had become since he had been domiciled with us. He looked at me now with the eye of a robin who is daring in pursuit of a crumb.

"I'm only delighted that you've found someone of the same way of thinking as yourself. What would you have done if Kinvarra hadn't turned up?"

"He's the prince of good fellows. Without him you would never have been able to endure me all these dark months."

"Now, that's generous. You mean you would never have been able to endure us."

"No, I don't, Miss Joan."

"You must, since you are free to go, and we are not."

Again Mr. Thorneycroft looked at me with the daring of a robin.

"I'm afraid I'm not really free to go, Miss Joan. I've been too happy here."

"Well, I'm glad," I said heartily, "because it's so pleasant to have you. I can hardly imagine now a time when we were without you and Miss Trescott."

"It's very good of you, Miss Joan, of all of you. I don't know that I've ever been so happy with ladies before. I can get on with men. I'm afraid ladies find me dull—and—and—insignificant."

Something in his humility touched me, for I said quite hotly:

"Perhaps men are usually quicker to recognize the good sportsman and the honest gentleman among each other. But I don't think we women are so stupid as all that."

His face beamed gratefully upon me.

"I sha'n't mind after all," he said, "if other ladies do think me insignificant, as I am, so long as you—and yours think kindly of me."

"Lord Kinvarra told us of your mountain-climbing," said I, defending him against himself.

"I've made a few ascents."

"And of the man-eating tiger in Nepal."

"Kinvarra would rather be talking of other men's poor little doings than of his own feats."

"It's sufficiently rare in human nature to be encouraged."

"Oh, come now, Miss Joan, it's common enough! In fact, I think any decent fellow would rather be put in the stocks than talk about himself or hear himself talked about; in that way I mean."

"By the way, Mr. Thorneycroft, did you notice anything about the new arrival that struck you particularly?"

He pondered a few seconds.

"No, then, Miss Joan, I can't say I did. I am a little short-sighted, and I only saw him in the dusk."

"You didn't think that he was the image of Betty?"

"No, why should he be?"

"Because he's our great-uncle."

"Oh, no one had told me that!"

"And you're not to know it now."

I explained matters to Mr. Thorneycroft, and now that it seemed to me the relationship was so plainly written upon those two faces, I was glad to have warned him lest he should have commented upon it openly.

"It need not be for long," I said deprecatingly. "But Betty wants to win Uncle Peter's friendship. Let her try her hand at it."

"It is very sweet of Miss Elizabeth. She is not likely to fail."

"Unless Uncle Peter is horribly angry when he finds out. But here comes Miss Trescott."

That lady in her serviceable short gown and stout boots was indeed coming upon us briskly out of the obscurities of the bog.

"Is that you, Joan, child?" she called as she approached. "Now, this is kind of you, and of Mr. Thorneycroft too. I'm not afraid of land or water fairies, or of ghosts or banshees, but this great expanse of glimmering pools is lonely."

"We should have met you further on only mother forgot."

"And I should have been nearer home only I went with Margaret to her own door."

"You didn't see Mrs. Synnott?"

"Margaret didn't ask me in, though I waited for her to. She seemed panic-stricken that I would go so far."

"What did you think of the house?"

"Horrible. Not that I could see much of it, except one starveling rush-light high up in a black front. What possessed them to build it on that spit of land with water on every side?"

"It was built by a man who was melancholy mad. It suits with Mrs. Synnott's mood, I should think, so she stays there."

"That poor girl! When she unlocked the door and went into the blackness beyond, I felt as if I must follow her and drag her back as from some evil and dangerous phantom."

"The builder of the house lay down one day and was drowned by the tide. He had tied his legs together lest he should come sane in the water, I suppose, and be tempted to live. So the fishermen found him when they drew him in with their nets."

"But what are we to do for Margaret?" said Miss Trescott uneasily. "Why should she be sacrificed to the monomania of an old woman? She will go mad too."

"Along this coast there are many mad people. I think it is the loneliness, though the people themselves say it is the living on fish, the phosphorus of which over-stimulates the brain."

"A fine scientific explanation, but I expect yours is the truer one. Anyhow, I am glad to be leaving that dreary place behind, and to be facing for the lights and warmth and cheer of Ardeelish."

"Uncle Peter has come, and he is the living image of Betty."

"Ah! that is awkward for our secrecy. Has he discovered the likeness?"

"I only saw him for a few minutes. It made me nervous to look at them together, lest somebody—Mr. Thorneycroft most likely, since he had not been warned—should blurt it out. I thought he kept watching Betty curiously as though he were trying to trace some memory which eluded him. I remember now that Nuala always says Betty is like our grandmother, Uncle Peter's sister, you know."

"So much the more reason the chit's plan should succeed. She would look bravely at the head of his table or riding in his carriages."

"You go as far ahead as Nuala. I am only afraid he may be angry when he finds out. A man who has kept his resentment all those years!"

"Because he couldn't find a way out of it. I am only afraid your mother will betray us before the plot is ripe. She is as transparent as a child. How does she take him?"

"Mrs. Langrishe was with her. Though the room was

dark I thought she looked pale. But she will run away from Uncle Peter; she is afraid of him, I am sure. I can't imagine what she would do if he tried to engage her in conversation. Turn and run probably."

"It is good for us that she is so faint-hearted."

"But she isn't really, you know, Miss Trescott. She would face anything for the right or for anyone she loved. You know how she nursed us all through diphtheria the time papa died, without any help or any comfort?"

"My dear, I know she is a mother in a million. Those lion-like creatures in the face of danger are often mice where there is none. But she has always had help and comfort from the Fount of those things. Don't say she had none."

When we had reached home and Miss Trescott was going upstairs to her own rooms she called to me to come with her. We always liked a visit to Miss Trescott's rooms. She had managed to surround herself with so many beautiful things out of those great trunks she carried, though her garments were of the simplest.

There was a cheery fire burning in the grate, and the Persian rug spread before it with the screen of old French embroidery making a cosy corner for a couple of low chairs, invited us to confidence. Miss Trescott got into a tea-gown and slippers before sending Stephanie for the tea, which we drank with slices of lemon after

the Russian fashion, I enjoying it much for my part, since Uncle Peter's apparition had spoilt my regular tea.

When we were settled comfortably by the fire, sipping the fragrant tea, Miss Trescott said suddenly:

"I'm unhappy about Margaret Synnott, Joan."

"Are you? I remember you were always interested in her. I don't think it's any use worrying, Miss Trescott; Margaret will drag her chain till her mother dies, and then miss it horribly ever afterwards."

"That's too easy a way of dismissing it from our minds, Joan, my dear. If I were to go away from here without trying to make Margaret's life a little happier, she would be a ghost with me for the rest of mine."

"What can one do?"

"I've heard of Patrick Stewart."

"Oh! Margaret's sometime lover?"

"Margaret's lover still, unless I make a great mistake. Listen, Joan, and tell me if it does not seem providential. You know I had talked about trying to find out where Patrick Stewart had drifted to, without very much hope, I confess, for many years had elapsed since I had met him, and he was a wanderer by disposition. So I had hardly begun to think of the first steps in my search, and here comes this letter from my friend, Kate Cantillon. We were together at Marienbad that year I met Patrick Stewart."

She unfolded a thin sheet of paper, and began looking

through it. At last she found the thing she wanted, and read it aloud to me:

Strangely enough, that Mr. Stewart is here again. I thought of you at once when I saw his face at the table d'hôte the evening we arrived. There he was, as friendless as ever, a little grayer, a little dustier, a little more silent. He did not seem to remember me when I went up to speak to him, till I recalled your name. Then he brightened for a minute or so, but relapsed into gloom when he discovered you were not of our party. Have you any messages for him beyond kind remembrances?

"It seems providential indeed," said I. "It is too strange for mere coincidence that you should have heard of him here, and now."

"I believe that, Joan. Anyhow, I tried to talk upon the subject with Margaret, and as gently as possible, but I only seemed to scare her out of her life. I began by telling her that I had met a friend of hers abroad once, I believed. 'Who?' she asked, looking at me with the eyes of a hare. 'I have so few friends except those we have just left.' 'Patrick Stewart,' I answered. She went white and red. 'I once knew someone of that name,' she said, 'but it is a long, long time ago.' 'He has not forgotten you,' I said. 'We parted in anger,' she murmured,

‘at least he was very angry.’ ‘Perhaps he misunderstood,’ I went on; ‘if it was so, couldn’t you let him know?’ It was then that she looked as if she would run away from me. ‘You don’t know what you are saying,’ she said. ‘My mother would never permit it.’ ‘Let me see her and ask her, Margaret,’ I pleaded. We were at the door-step by then, and she nearly pushed me away—at least the gesture of her hands did as she turned and went in. The dark house was like a dark curtain shutting her away from life and hope.”

CHAPTER XIX.

BETTY ON HORSEBACK.

IT was pleasant to let one’s own troubles, and those of other people, lie awhile, and look on with folded hands at how prettily Elizabeth played the game with Uncle Peter.

If he had not liked her very much to start with she could hardly have done it so well; but almost from the beginning it was so evident that she was pleasing in his sight that Elizabeth bloomed ever more radiant, like a flower with a caressing sun and a kind wind.

The weeks after New Year went fast; gray days were January’s, gray and tender, with a promise of spring in the wind that brought the crocus up in the garden beds,

and the celandine in the hedgerows. That minstrel, the blackbird, fluted one warm, wet day of early January, confident, as though it were April.

It was a splendid hunting season, and we were glad that Uncle Peter should enjoy the best of sport with the Blazers. Our anxiety was that Elizabeth should keep our secret till she had had time to win his heart, as she was bent on doing; and fortune and Uncle Peter seemed to favour her design.

He came out one evening with the startling proposal that Elizabeth should hunt.

"Why shouldn't Miss Betty hunt, ma'am?" he said to mother, who, as usual, was keeping a safe distance from him.

It was in the drawing-room after dinner, and I had withdrawn into the chimney-corner by mother, who was knitting as usual, pausing now and again to look towards Elizabeth at the piano, playing and singing apparently for her own delight. I was taking but a lazy interest in my novel; I found that my own affairs came between me and my reading that winter; and was watching dreamily the flash of the diamonds in mother's old keeper ring as she knitted, and the poise of Elizabeth's head as she sang.

She had just concluded "A Rose-Tree in Full Bearing", and had turned over the pages of the thick music-book, which had been mother's when she was a girl.

"Why shouldn't Miss Betty hunt?" went on Uncle

Peter, having come into the drawing-room and taken up his favourite stand on the hearth-rug. At first we had not seen him in the drawing-room after dinner; he had retired early since he was abroad early, and we had left him over his wine, and seen no more of him till next evening. But this was the third evening he had come into the drawing-room.

"My girls would have hunted, no doubt, if their father had lived," mother answered with a certain fluttered dignity. "As it is there are—difficulties."

"H'm!" said Uncle Peter in his rapid way. "They have wanted an escort, perhaps."

"Partly that, sir," said mother, going on knitting.

"Miss Betty can ride."

"All Galway girls can ride; they are born to it."

"Let me be Miss Betty's escort, ma'am. I can pilot a lady over even as rough country as you have here."

"My daughter has no horse."

"Let her ride my Jet; she's not up to my weight, and she has carried a lady, I believe. Hey, what do you say, ma'am?"

"You had better ask my daughter herself," said mother, looking helplessly about her as if to seek wisdom for her reply.

"Miss Betty will jump at it. She's a fine, spirited girl; you ought to be proud of her."

"We are all proud of Elizabeth."

"'Tis a pity she's thrown away here. I beg your pardon, ma'am; I like country life for a girl myself, but this girl shines. She should be seen. When I was a young fellow, egad, if such a girl had appeared there'd have been a dozen of us young bloods ready to shoot each other over her. She's an uncommonly engaging young lady, ma'am."

Mother looked down guiltily. Perhaps she felt that Elizabeth's plan was succeeding too easily. Uncle Peter's next speech came like a thunderbolt.

"Do you happen to know, ma'am, in the southern part of this county, a place called Derrymore?"

We were both dumb with consternation, and mother looked down at her lap, while her hands that held the knitting-needles trembled.

"We do know such a place," I made answer for her.

"Ah, you do!" he said, evidently thinking that mother's silence meant that she did not. "Sir Jasper Burke's family once lived there; I understand they have left the place."

"They have left it long ago," I said quaking for the next question.

"Do you know what family he left?"

"A widow and three daughters."

"Ah! there was no son?"

"There was no son."

"It ought to be easy to find them out," he said speaking

to himself, "if one made up one's mind to do it. I shouldn't need Schofield for that."

I knew that Mr. Schofield—Schofield, Sons, and Saunders,—was Uncle Peter's legal adviser, for I had seen his name attached to some papers that had belonged to papa.

At this moment mother suddenly stood up and went out of the room. Her going created a diversion, for before Uncle Peter could return to the subject, Elizabeth sprang up from the music-stool and came towards us, fanning herself with the great black and yellow fan which her godmother had given her with a mantilla from Spain.

As she came she flashed her brilliant smile at Uncle Peter. His expression as he smiled back at her was a revelation to me, though I had known Elizabeth stood well in his favour. Well, after all there must be something in ties of kinship, since here was Uncle Peter looking at Elizabeth as though she were a beloved daughter, and four weeks ago they had not met. If nothing succeeds like success, then was Elizabeth's masquerade apparently in act to be justified.

"Do you know what I've been doing for you?" he said, with that fond paternal air.

"I can't imagine. Something pleasant, I make no doubt."

"I've been asking your mother to let you hunt."

"I've no horse."

"My Jet will carry you. She's a sweet-tempered beast, with a mouth like silk."

"I shouldn't care if she weren't."

"I don't suppose you would," chuckled Uncle Peter. "You'd like a troublesome brute, I make no doubt."

"I certainly should. But Jet is a darling. You don't mean it, Mr. Burton?"

"Ask Miss Joan here. She sat in her corner like a mouse and listened to the discussion."

"And mother said I might?"

"She told me to ask you. She might have said something more, but she seemed to remember something suddenly, for she went off in rather a hurry. You can take a stone wall?"

"I have never ridden to hounds, but I think I can take a stone wall."

"You'll have to be sure of it, Miss Betty, before I take you out, and I must be sure of it too. What would the country say to me if such beauty got hurt?"

"The country, except the tiniest fraction of it, wouldn't feel a penny the worse."

"Ah, wait till the young bucks have seen you!"

"I told you not to flatter," said Elizabeth, with pretty imperativeness.

"I'm old enough to tell the truth without offence."

"Ah, but is it the truth?"

"Ask your glass, Miss Betty, or the young fellows' eyes."

"Ah, you are incorrigible, Mr. Burton!"

But there was no rebuke in Elizabeth's laughing voice.

"However, that is not the question. The question is about your riding to hounds. I'll tell you what. I must have you out for a few mornings on Jet, privately. I'll see how you take the stone walls then."

"Are you sure you'll be a safe pilot?"

"Perfectly sure. I mightn't be if I were a youngster. I might lose my head. There'd be an excuse for it, anyhow."

"I've no habit."

"I know a man in the Haymarket who'll send you one in two days. You've only to send him your measurements; you ladies understand about that."

"I've a better way," said Elizabeth. "There's a very handy little man in Carnaross will run me up a coat and skirt in next to no time."

"Never mind," said Uncle Peter; "I don't suppose it's at your habit we'll be looking."

I listened in amazement. Was it possible that Elizabeth was going to dare all the chances of premature discovery by following the Blazers under Uncle Peter's escort? Why, half the members of the Hunt would come up to say how glad they were to see Jasper Burke's daughter out. However, Elizabeth was best left to herself. She had courage enough for any emergency, as I

realized, hearing what followed; for Uncle Peter had harked back to the Burkes.

"Tell me," he said—"I was asking your mother about it, but she went away so suddenly that I forgot I hadn't finished my questions—what's become of the Burkes of Derrymore?"

"They are settled in another part of the country."

A brighter scarlet flashed in Elizabeth's cheek, and her eyes, the velvet eyes of the South, met Uncle Peter's intrepidly. If here was a difficulty indeed, be sure Elizabeth's courage was equal to it.

"Near here?"

"Quite close to here."

"You know the girls, perhaps?"

"No one better."

"Ah, I had not understood that. Nor had it struck me that they might be still in the same county. Tell me something about them."

"Their mother—"

"I did not ask about their mother."

"Oh, but you have to hear about their mother to understand about them! Their mother is the dearest, sweetest, loveliest—"

"So I have heard before." Uncle Peter's voice was chilly. "But the girls, are they good girls?"

"As good as girls usually are. They are devoted to their mother."

"Strong?"

"They enjoy very good health."

"Handsome?"

"Their friends think them fairly so."

"Are you a friend of theirs, Miss Betty? I suppose there are not so many families in this part of the country that you wouldn't all know each other, and be glad of each other's society."

"Yes, I think I may say I am a friend of theirs," said Elizabeth judicially. "At least, I always try to do my best for them."

"How are they thought of? How does the county regard them? In their father's father's time none held their heads higher in this country of long descents."

"They have never lowered their heads," with an unconscious lifting of her own. "They remember they are Burkes of Derrymore, though they are poor, and Sir Jasper Burke's children have grown up in another house than that which was theirs by right."

"It was their father's fault. But for his folly his girls had been heiresses. They have had to pay for his marrying the wrong woman."

"The right woman," said Elizabeth. "They would not exchange their mother for the wealth of the world."

"They are their father's children, then."

"They are proud to be so, and their mother's."

"They are lucky in having a friend to stand up for

them. The—mother”—he brought it out as if it was distasteful to him—“the mother has taken care of them, then.”

“‘As the hen gathereth her chickens’,” quoted Elizabeth seriously. “She has never let the wind blow roughly upon them.”

“Well, that is in her favour,” acknowledged Uncle Peter grumpily. “You say they left Derrymore long since.”

“Close upon Sir Jasper Burke’s marriage.”

“Has it passed from their hands?”

“They retain the ownership, which is little good to them, since they can never afford to live there. A Scotchman, Mr. Frazer, has it, and would buy it if they would sell. But Sir Jasper Burke would not sell, hoping that some day he might return there. After his death things were worse, as the little property he had been able to leave for a provision for his wife and children became valueless through the operations of the Land League. His widow, however, still refuses to sell, although the rent of Derrymore does not do much more than pay for their present house, and give them a little income to live upon. But for the cost of keeping up Derrymore she would hope to return to it one day.”

“You seem to know a good deal about these people, these Burkes, Miss Betty.”

“I take an interest in them, Mr. Burton.”

"Do you know why they gave up Derrymore?"

"It was a family—disagreement."

"You never heard anything about a—a—detestable old tyrant who ruined them because he could not—have his own way?"

"I can't imagine Lady Burke teaching that tradition to her children."

"Ah, well, I'm glad if she doesn't. Thank you, Miss Betty, for telling me so much. I take a sort of interest in those children of Sir Jasper Burke. Do they ever come here?"

"Constantly."

"Then I might come on them one day?"

"Any day of the week."

"So I shall be able to see for myself. Thank you, Miss Betty. Well, I think I'll say 'good-night'. I hunt to-morrow, and have a hard day's riding before me, I hope. The next day we shall have our ride together, then?"

"Very well, Mr. Burton."

"You are audacious, Betty," said I, when the door had closed behind him. We were alone, for mother had not returned, and Delia was staying with Mrs. Langrishe, while Mr. Thorneycroft was keeping Lord Kinvarra company for the night, and Miss Trescott had had business to take her to London.

"Audacious?" cried Elizabeth, with a beaming face.

"Then '*l'audace, l'audace, toujours l'audace!*' Why, Uncle Peter is mine already."

"He will expect to see the Burkes."

"He shall see them. The time is nearly ripe to tell him, unless, indeed, he should learn by a happy accident."

"You are not afraid of an unhappy one, Betty?"

"Rubbish!" cried my sister gaily. "You are ever the Cassandra, Joan dear. But look at me and say if I look as though I and unhappiness had anything to do with each other."

She nodded to herself in the pier-glass between the windows, waving her great fan excitedly to and fro. Radiant and flushed, she certainly did not look as if she were made for unhappiness.

CHAPTER XX.

"LOVE THAT IS DONE."

WE did not know if Miss Trescott's interference in her affairs had frightened Margaret Synnott away, but anyhow, after that evening Miss Trescott had accompanied her home, she came no more. A note brought by a barefooted urchin the following day merely said that her mother's health was becoming so feeble that she did not feel justified in being absent from her so many hours of the day. Mother acquiesced sorrow-

fully, because her visits to us, quiet as they were, made poor Margaret's only window upon life.

"It is her pride," said Elizabeth. "She knows that the future Lady Kinvarra can dispense with a *gouvernante*, and she has a ridiculous idea, no doubt, or her old mother has, that her coming here is a sort of charity."

Elizabeth's explanation seemed like enough to be true. For some weeks we heard nothing of Margaret, nor did she come to see us in response to our invitations, nor extend any to us on her own account.

"I'm going to see Margaret Synnott," I announced one day at lunch.

"Alone, dear?" asked mother anxiously.

"I can't bring an escort," I said, answering Mr. Thorneycroft's eager look at the same time. "To go alone is my only chance of admittance to the Ogre's Castle. I can't have Betty, because Mrs. Langrishe comes this afternoon; nor Delia, because Kinvarra comes with her; and even if you could leave your friend, motherkin, you couldn't walk there by the bog way, and it is miles to drive round by the road."

"You must start early, and be back early," said mother.

"There will be a moon," I replied, "and you know that, barring accidents with the bog itself, the road is as safe as your drawing-room—safer in some ways," I added as an after-thought. "I shall take Grip for com-

pany, and as the moon will be up about five, I shall have plenty of light there and back."

It was true that our part of the country was absolutely safe, and no one had any misgivings about my walk, except perhaps Mr. Thorneycroft, who kept watching me in his wistful way till I had taken my departure, and looked after me from the door-step, when I departed, with the very air of a dog that has been bidden to stay at home.

As I came downstairs, with Grip noisily barking about my heels, I encountered Nuala.

"Did you hear the news, Miss Joan?" she asked.

"What news, Nuala?"

"Bad. They've took little Kitty home on me, and to-night's the night o' the match-making."

"She said Shrove," I cried, dumbfounded. "It wants nearly three weeks to Shrove."

"Ould Paddy O'Keeffe, the ould villin of the world, has hastened it," said Nuala. "He wouldn't pay the pound for the license, and they've got to be called three times, an' married this side of Shrove. D'ye think ould Paddy 'ud give the little girl the chance of slippin' his fingers through the six weeks of Lent?"

"Why didn't you tell us, Nuala?"

"Small chance I got. Tom Sweeney came for the little girl himself, not an hour ago, wid the ass-cart to take away her bits o' things. Poor Kitty fell all of a

thrimble whin she seen him. 'Pluck up, girl,' says I to her, 'an' resist him. I'll back you, an' the young ladies'll back you, and Herself'll back you.' Yerra, you might as well be axin' a chicken to stan' up to a weasel. She kep' puttin' her little things into her box, an' she shakin' that much I had to help her; though, faix, I didn't like doin' it. 'Larry's dead!' she says in a whisper, 'an' no good comes o' disobayin' your parents,' says she; 'an', sure, what good am I wid Larry dead? Only for them to marry me to whomsodever they like.' 'Twill be a quare day for you,' says I, 'if Larry comes home alive an' finds you Mrs. O'Keeffe!' Och! I wouldn't say it again for a dale. She looked as if she'd seen the terriblest soort av a ghost. She's a religious little girl or I'd be afeard of her doin' herself a mischief. Bedad, I don't think 'tis much of her Paddy O'Keeffe'll be havin', as I said to her father."

"You spoke to him, Nuala?"

"I remonstherated wid him, Miss Joan, but sorra good it was. The man doesn't like a bone in my skin, any more thin I like him. Still I done me best to spake him fair. 'Tom Sweeney,' says I, 'this is a most nefarious act you're about contemplatin',' says I, 'to give that little girl o' yours to an ould money-bag, as ould and hardened as yourself,' says I, 'an' she as good as promised to another man.' He looked at me rale bitter. 'I'd ha' been saved a dale o' trouble,' says he, 'if I'd kep' me

little girl away from you,' says he, 'fillin' her head wid stuff an' nonsense about love, and tachin' her to disobey her parents.' 'Love! Tom Sweeney,' says I. 'Take back that word this minit, an' me a single woman too.' 'Och, the ould maids is the foolishhest of any,' says he. 'I wouldn't be an ould maid, then,' says I, 'if I hadn't been frightened off min whin poor Biddy took your ugly yallow face an' your black heart. Go on, you murderer!' says I. I thought he'd choke then, but before he could get out a word I run into the kitchen an' I slammed the door. 'If you put your nose inside this door, Tom Sweeney,' I shouted through the keyhole, 'I'll hit you over the head wid the fryin'-pan that's very handy simmerin' a few onions on the fire, an' spoil your beauty for Biddy,' says I. That'll give you an idea of Tom Sweeney, Miss Joan; a tongue as black an' bitther as his heart."

"It was a fine encounter, Nuala," I said, "but I'm afraid it hasn't helped poor Kitty."

"Sure, I suppose it didn't," said Nuala philosophically, "but at laste I done my best."

I set out on my walk with rather a heavy heart. Perhaps, after all, the only thing that would have really influenced Tom Sweeney was a question of money, and we had none. As I crossed the bog I had a wild thought that perhaps I ought to have asked Kinvarra to help us. But if we succeeded in breaking the match with Paddy

O'Keeffe, there would be only a new match-making presently, with a bridegroom as little desirable; for the few young men of the country were not likely to suit Tom Sweeney's views for his daughter.

At last I left the bog between its mountains behind, and came out upon the rough road of sand and boulders that led to Margaret Synnott's home. From the road I could see the bed of the river on either side the house, a mere mass of boulders with a thin stream below, for that had been a phenomenally dry winter so far, though, as the poor people said, the months to come were pretty sure to make up for it.

I found the house as Miss Trescott had described it—gaunt against the empty spaces of treeless air, with never a light in its windowed front, though the dusk of the short winter day was beginning to close in.

I had knocked more than once before the door was opened to me by Margaret herself.

She seemed glad to see me, and yet had a startled air, as if she were not quite sure if she might receive visitors. She brought me into a damp, mouldy-smelling room; and then, before we had had more than time to look at each other, there was a sound in an upper room as if someone were pushing a chair about.

"It is my mother," said Margaret hastily. "She wants to know who my visitor is. Let me tell her, and light her lamp for her. Then I shall get you some tea."

The high, narrow, dark room where Margaret left me had something ill-omened about it. It looked as if the sun had never entered it. I peered about it in the twilight, at its horrible furniture of black horse-hair, its green rep curtains, the shadows in its corners, the indistinguishable pictures on the wall, and I shivered and was glad to take up Grip and feel the eager lick of his tongue on my cheek. I had thought of the suicide. Surely, I said to myself, when they found him they laid him on that sofa.

The harmless piece of furniture assumed all at once a horrible aspect in my eyes. I was gazing at it with fascinated horror when Margaret returned, carrying a couple of candles in dim silver candlesticks. They hardly lit the gloomy room, but it was pleasant to see Margaret herself, a human being in this melancholy place.

"Well, Joan," she said, "it was good of you to come to see me all this way, and I am very glad to see you, my dear, though I can give you scant entertainment."

"I don't want any, Margaret," said I.

"But you must have a cup of tea. You won't mind my leaving you for a few minutes to get it?"

"Let me come with you, Margaret."

"Very well. It is only in the next room. I don't use the kitchen. It is so damp and dark down there."

I followed her into a little room off the hall, such as might have been intended for hats and coats. There

was a handful of embers in a tiny grate. Margaret set about blowing them into life.

"Let me," I said, "while you get the cups and saucers."

Tea is a beverage so suggestive of a cheerful sociability that to me it could never quite lose its pleasantness, but I was determined to have it here rather than in that dreadful room, for here the dresser and the kitchen utensils and the fire seemed to make for as much cheerfulness as could be possible in such a house.

"Do you keep no servant, Margaret?" I asked.

"My mother doesn't care to have one about," she answered, "which is just as well, perhaps, since the one we had after old deaf and dumb Katty ran away. The house is too lonely for them."

"And do you do everything for yourself?"

"Yes; amn't I a Cinderella?" looking down with melancholy humour at her roughened hands and the well-worn black gown, which indeed showed traces of housework. "I don't know how the real servants keep so smart and clean. I suppose we are more awkward, not being used to it."

"How have you been, Margaret?"

"Quite well, thank you, Joan."

"You don't look very well."

"I am not the thriving sort, I suppose. But I really feel as well as usual."

"This house is damp, Margaret."

"Naturally, being built in the fork of the river."

"Why do you stay in it?"

"Beggars can't be choosers, Joan."

The tea was made now and we sat down to it. It was a good cup of tea, for I had taken the making of it out of Margaret's unsure hands, and it seemed to warm and brighten her.

"It is very nice to see you, Joan," she said, with what was enthusiasm for her.

"I'd have come before: in fact, we all of us have wanted to come, only we didn't know if we might."

She seemed to start and recover herself.

"Perhaps it is as well not. My mother—has the ways of an invalid. She is apt to think herself forgotten if I leave her."

"Are you to be cut off from the world altogether, then?"

"Think of her, Joan. She never goes out: she is always looking across those bare flats to the sea, always the same, without company, without kindness, other than mine, year after year."

"She chooses it. The question is, when have you been out?"

"I do not know. I have nothing to take me out. They send a boy from the village shop for orders once a week. It would not be easy for me to go, since the old woman, who used to be here when I went to you, who could be trusted, has left us."

"She did not run away?"

"My mother did not care for her about."

"And the result is that you never go out. I don't believe you have been out of this house for the past month. You are getting the waxen face of a creature deprived of air and light. Margaret, Margaret, you will kill yourself!"

"I shall take a deal of killing, Joan."

"Do you think your friends are going to stand by and see it?"

"I don't think my friends can help me."

It was my despair at the quiet obstinacy in her eyes that made me say a desperate thing.

"We shall have to see, then, if—Patrick Stewart won't."

A look of great suffering passed over her face.

"Forgive me, Margaret," I cried, shocked at the pain I had caused.

"You didn't know, Joan," she said gently. "You are only a young girl. I am—nearly middle-aged, and it hurts to have those things brought back. You didn't know, dear."

"Oh, I know, I know well enough!" I cried, and the tears rushed from my eyes. "I am twenty-two, Margaret, and I care for someone, and I am unhappy."

"Poor Joan, poor Joan," said Margaret. "I am so sorry. I thought you were so happy. It has always seemed to me that you girls were safe."

"If a man cared for me, as this man cared for you, I wouldn't let him go."

Margaret turned if possible paler.

"I did not know then that I wronged him. Let it be, Joan. It is all dead and done with long ago."

"Why need it be?" I went on stubbornly; "if he still cares for you, as Miss Trescott says he does."

"He cared for a young girl who is dead. I—am gray-haired. Look at me!"

I looked at her unflinchingly.

"You'd be awfully pretty, Margaret, if you were happy and prettily dressed. As for your age, what is it? You aren't more than thirty-five."

"I shall be thirty-four at Michaelmas. Many women are young at that age; but I am old."

"Let Patrick Stewart say."

"You are mad, Joan. If I thought he were coming into this room I should creep into a mouse-hole to escape him. I should see in his face more clearly than in any glass that I was become miserably old and faded, and sad."

"He would change all that. *You* would love *him* even though the years had changed him."

"Women are different."

"They are not. Love is love with men or women."

"There; we will not talk about it any more. I have never spoken of this to anyone before. You have made

me talk, Joan, because you said you were unhappy. Now we shall never talk of it again."

There was a sudden, sharp, jangling peal at the bell.

"My mother!" cried Margaret, jumping up. "I had forgotten her."

She looked at me, and the old mask of reserve had fallen again upon her face.

"Let us forget what we've been talking about, Joan. And come again sometime—when the days are longer and the marsh-marigold is out on the bog. It is pleasant then. Now I must fly."

She put her arms round me suddenly and kissed me. I thought it was as much for her own unhappiness as for mine. Till this evening I had hardly thought of Margaret Synnott as one with warm human feelings like my own. Now I returned the kiss almost with ardour.

"Good-bye," she called after me from the dark doorway in a whisper, as if she feared our farewells being overheard. "I wish I could come a little way with you, dear Joan; but I mustn't."

"I'm not afraid the least little bit," I called back, and began to run, with Grip barking merrily at my heels. The moon was up, and the night smelt deliciously. There was a promise of spring in the wind. Who knew what the spring might bring?

CHAPTER XXI.

A MATCH-MAKING.

THE road through the bog was but a narrow causeway of stones, safe and solid in the midst of treacherous earth and water. There was scant room for a donkey-cart to pass: if one met a foot-passenger he had to sit down and dangle his heels over a bog-hole till the vehicle had gone on. Somewhere about the middle of the bog was a sort of island, where Paddy Rafferty had built his cottage and made his garden. It was perhaps the debris brought down by some old flood that tethered this bit of solid earth in the midst of the bog. Anyhow Paddy Rafferty's garden was a sight. Made of leaf-mould and peat and alluvial soil, it grew everything incredibly well. Paddy's cottage, too, in the midst of the bog was the greatest of company. It was never so far behind you nor so far in front of you, if you were out at night, that you did not feel the comfort of its solitary candle lit to guide Mrs. Rafferty at her spinning-wheel and loom, and shining through the little window across the bog like a good deed in a naughty world.

I was about a quarter of a mile from Paddy's when I saw ahead of me in the road something that made my heart leap with sudden terror. It was a dark shape, blacker in the moonlight, lying half in half out the

shadow of some great boulders that at this point made a sort of wall between the road and the bog.

The peasants would have thought it something supernatural at this hour and place. I never doubted that it was human, but that was sufficiently disturbing. I gave a longing backward glance to Margaret Synnott in her comfortless home; another towards rosy-cheeked Mrs. Rafferty setting the threads by the light of her candle, and thinking, as she had told me she thought when Paddy was out and the bog lonely, that the bog was as much in God's eye as Carnaross or even as Dublin.

Then I went forward steadily though my heart was in my mouth. This might be a fellow-creature in need of assistance.

Grip had gone ahead of me barking lustily. It was Grip's way to regard the world as his domain, or at least that part of it where he happened to be, and to treat every other creature as a trespasser. Following him with a briskness that concealed my inward trepidation, I felt oddly comforted to see that he had stopped barking, and was licking the hand the fallen man had extended to him, with great friendliness.

"Are you hurt?" I asked, coming up with that pretence of briskness.

A face which I could see to be young and kindly, and which I half-recognized, was turned towards me.

"I'm not to say rightly much hurt, Miss — Miss

Burke—you're one of the young ladies from Ardeelish House, aren't you? 'Tis but a twisht I gev th' ould ankle o' me. I was that glad to be back that I had no more sinse thin to go leppin' like a goat from wan ould rock to another, but begor, they've sarved me a quare mane turn, for I can't put th' ould foot o' me under me at all, howsomever I try."

"Why," cried I, "you're Larry Monahan, aren't you? God has sent you in time after all. They're making Kitty's match to-night."

"To-night!" he cried sharply. "She said Shrove. It wants three weeks of it."

"They've hastened it, but you've come in time after all, thank God."

"To-night did you say? Sure I was on my way to Ardeelish House to see her. Now sure I might as well be back in the Klondyke as where I am."

"Not quite. Are you in much suffering?"

"I'm aisy enough. Can you get me out of it, miss? I must be on my way to Kitty. To think of them making her match with ould O'Keeffe, the villin, this night of all nights!"

"Be quiet, Larry; you've come in time. Why didn't you come before? It has nearly killed Kitty."

"Tell me, is she in a bad way?"

"Nothing but what you can set right. Why didn't you come before?"

"Well, you see, Miss Joan—you are Miss Joan, aren't

you?" I nodded my head. "I knew 'twas no use going to Tom Sweeney empty-handed, an' poor Kitty, if she was to marry me under her father's anger, 'twould fret her, though he's been the hard, unnatural father to her. So I joined some o' my comrades out there, an' we went to Klondyke."

"Why didn't you send her word?"

"I did before I started; but sure, letters are little bits o' things to be crossin' the wide ocean: 'tis no wonder they do be gettin' lost at times. An' I was never a scholar; the directions may have been wrote quare. Then at last wan of her broken-hearted little screeds o' letters, with the tears blisterin' the paper all over, came to me by the goodness o' God. 'Twas a boy from th' ould diggin's in New York came up to join us, an' carried the letter along. An' the minit I read it, though I was doin' well, an' they wor sayin' the snow 'ud come at any minit an' block the Pass, I started, an' here I am by the mercy o' God, safe an' sound, except for a weeshy crick in my ankle. Now, miss, how are you goin' to get me out of it? I must stop the match-makin'."

I had been thinking all the time, and had come to a conclusion.

"I'll send Paddy Rafferty's ass-cart for you; but it would take you hours to get to Sweeney's by road with Paddy's little ass. Keep your mind easy; I'll go to Sweeney's myself."

"You, miss?"

"I—I shall be able to take the short cut. Match-making is not marrying, but if I'm there in time it will save a lot of talk, and Kitty must be put out of suffering as soon as possible."

"The Lord reward you!"

"Tell me one thing; how did you do at Klondyke?"

"'Twill seem a big fortune to them here. I was among the first to peg out a claim, and it sold well when I left. I'm maybe worth ten thousand dollars."

I could see that he waited for an exclamation of surprise and delight, and he got it.

"Why, Mr. Monahan!" I cried, "you mustn't be Larry any more. What are you going to do with it?"

"Buy a little farm for Kitty to be the mistress of; I've had enough of towns."

"You have the money safe?"

"I've a draft on a bank for it. You don't think I'd be carryin' what manes Kitty to me tied up in my ould red handkercher!"

"That makes everything easy. Now, be quiet till Paddy comes for you; I'll send you word of the match-making to-night. There is only to change the bridegrooms; the marriage can take place at Shrove after all."

I went away with a high heart, and almost sang as I ran along the bog road to Paddy's cottage. The spring

was coming! the spring was coming! who could tell what ship was on the sea for me too?

By great good-luck I found Paddy at home, and sent him at once to put the ass in the cart to fetch Larry Monahan. Mrs. Rafferty, who was a brisk, capable little woman, got a feather bed in readiness to put on the cart, and announced her intention of accompanying her husband lest he should not be equal to the task of getting Larry up unaided. But of this I had little fear, since Larry could stand on the one foot if supported, though it gave him great pain to let the other hang even for a second. However, he couldn't stay out on the bog road till a more comfortable litter was obtained.

That done I pushed on to Martin's at the head of the glen. There, having asked for the escort of one of the boys over the hill, I wrote a note to mother on a leaf of my note-book, asking her to send Jim with the covered car for me to Sweeney's, and despatched another of the swift-footed urchins with it.

Then I set out in company with Thady Martin, a talkative, shrewd boy, whose gossip of the neighbourhood, and talk of banshees, witches, and fairies would at another time have delighted me; but now I was caught into a breathless, human drama, and these bodiless things had no substance for me.

It was a long way to Sweeney's as we took it. Indeed, I was not surprised to hear the clock at Kinvarra Castle

strike seven as we descended the hill to Sweeney's cabin.

The little windows were brilliantly alight, and the light streamed through the interstices of the door and half-door. We got up to the house without the yelping of dogs which is the common greeting at an Irish cabin, but I remembered Nuala's account of Tom Sweeney's hard-fistedness, and thought that he would not feed a dog much less pay its license.

As we approached I made a sign for quietness to Thady, and picking up Grip to keep him quiet I came near the window and looked in. Inside, the deep sill was so full of ragged geraniums in pots that a face outside was well screened. I had often heard of the match-makings; now I looked upon one.

There was a wooden table in the middle of the floor, upon which stood a bottle of whisky and a few glasses. At one side of the table sat Tom Sweeney, glowering even more than usual; on the other the crafty old face of Paddy O'Keeffe confronted him. Each wore an expression of the utmost obstinacy. At the end of the table a little sharp, foxy, red-haired man was standing, partly leaning over the table on which his extended fingers rested. He was gazing with almost comical anxiety, first in one face, then in another, and the movements of his head were rapid as those of a bird.

It was all in dumb show, but I could fill in the outline



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"EACH WORE AN EXPRESSION OF THE UTMOST OBSTINACY"

for myself. Had I not known a marriage to be broken off after three days of negotiations, when everything else had been yielded, because the bride's father would not include in her portion a three-legged pot?

They had evidently reached a crux in the proceedings; but that might mean nothing. Rich as old Paddy O'Keeffe was, he would wring as good a portion as possible from the bride's father; and though Tom Sweeney had only a few acres of land on the mountain side, he was reputed "snug", having indeed worked like a cart-horse all the days of his life. Every item of the portion would be stubbornly fought. There would be innumerable feigned withdrawals and ruptures of the negotiations before things would be settled. The little red-haired man was the official match-maker, and his business it was to suggest compromises and open the door out of difficulties.

I looked from the sharp, hard, eager faces to Kitty, whom I guessed at in the dark corner, but her apron was thrown over her face, and she was rocking herself to and fro in silent anguish. Her mother sat beside her, a decent peasant woman, wearing a high white cap. She kept glancing anxiously from her daughter to her husband, as if she were afraid. But if she thought Paddy O'Keeffe would notice and resent his bride's despairing attitude it was an unnecessary fear, for Paddy had apparently stuck fast in the calf or the pig or the turkeys, and was insensible to all else.

I had seen enough. I went round to the door and knocked for admittance. Kitty's mother opened to me, and mechanically stood back to let me enter.

"It is Miss Joan," I heard Kitty cry.

Tom Sweeney scowled at me with a suspicion that I had come to interrupt the match-making; old O'Keeffe made me an awkward bow; the match-maker stared at me. For a moment the silence was unbroken. Then I broke it myself.

"I have come to tell you, Kitty, that Larry Monahan has come home."

"Larry, alive and well!" cried Kitty with an incredulous delight on her face.

"Whisht, girl," said her father, "he gave you the go-by long enough; it's too late now for him to come back."

"Mr. Sweeney," said I, speaking with the utmost sweetness of tone, "Larry has been to the Klondyke, the gold-fields, you know; he has brought back ten thousand dollars!"—I rolled out the words as if I loved them—"ten thousand dollars; that is two thousand pounds of our money."

"Is it true?" said Tom Sweeney. "He was a little good-for-naught, always fishin' the trout strames wid a crooked pin an' a worm, when he should have been earning thruppence a day frightenin' crows."

"It is true. The money is safe in a London bank. He has a draft for it; I saw it."

"Two thousand pounds!" repeated Tom Sweeney; but Kitty was laughing and crying against her mother's shoulder.

Old O'Keeffe was looking helplessly from one to another of us. The match-maker, who was turning a quid of tobacco from one cheek to another, smiled a humorous little smile that brought a thousand fine lines of shrewdness and mockery into his nut-brown face. We all waited to see what Tom Sweeney would do. We were not long in suspense, for he suddenly put his two hands on the table and leant across it, facing Paddy O'Keeffe with an expression of the utmost malignity.

"Two thousand pounds!" he repeated, turning the words over on his tongue, and rolling them about as though they tasted sweet. "Two thousand pounds! D'ye hear that, Paddy O'Keeffe? What's your dirty little shop an' your common little jauntin'-car to that, hey? That's the soort o' man I want for a son-in-law; not you, you dried-up little carcase of a man, wid your ugly yallow face. You'd take the calf off me, would you? an' the couple o' boneens an' the woman's flock o' geese? Och, you'd strip me, or you wouldn't take my little fair, soft, innocent girl. Now, I tell you plainly she isn't for you, Paddy O'Keeffe, nor for any of your mane soort; an' the sooner you're after removin' yourself from my little place the better I'll be plazed."

"Sure I wouldn't be in it, man," said Paddy, "if you

didn't ax me; at laste, this man here axed me for you."

"Here, don't be givin' impidence, Paddy O'Keeffe. You've had your drop o' good whisky, so go!"

"Och, Mr. O'Keeffe, sure this is no place at all for us," said the match-maker, highly delighted. "We'd best be goin'. 'Tis plain no wan wants us, an' I suppose the match that's comin' off won't need any makin'. Come along, man; sure there's plenty o' time to find you a wife before Shrove. There's Miss Maguire at the post-office."

"Too ould," said Paddy, draining his whisky in spite of Tom Sweeney's insults.

"Yerra! listen to the ould villin," broke in Mrs. Sweeney, emboldened by her husband's attitude to add to the insults he had heaped on Paddy. "Too ould, he says; as if any dacent man's child was too ould for him, that was ould as far back as any of us remimbers. To think of him lookin' for a young wife, an' poor 'Statia, the kind woman that was unlucky enough to listen to him, but a twelvemonth in her grave. Go home, you ould Bluebeard!"

"Arrah, hould your tongue, woman," said her spouse. "'Tis worse nor a lot o' hins screechin' an' cacklin' whin wan o' your sex begins to talk (axing your pardon, Miss Burke). Give over, woman, an' make the house dacent, yourself an' your daughter. Where did you say Mr.

Monahan, my son-in-law that is to be, was, miss? I ought to be the first to welcome him home. But not till the house is clear o' this trash"—contemptuously indicating Paddy O'Keeffe, who was just going.

"Good-evenin' to you, Mr. O'Keeffe," Mrs. Sweeney called out shrilly, undeterred by her spouse's rebuke. "I hope we won't see your face for a month o' Sundays, my good man. Faix, if I thought you'd come I'd be axin' Miss Joan here for a lend of her little dog to frighten you off the primises."

CHAPTER XXII.

FOR MOTHER.

ELIZABETH'S morning rides with Uncle Peter went on gaily. Her godmother, hearing of the hunting plan, had given her a habit so well cut that she need not fear comparison with any huntress in Galway. And her steed, though a trifle substantially built for her, was yet not obtrusively so, since Elizabeth was becoming as well-grown a young woman as one would wish to see, having, indeed, as soon as her twenties were past, begun to leave behind the slimness of the girl for contours that suited her height.

I remember that one morning Miss Trescott, who was back with us again, mother, and I stood at the drawing-

room window watching Elizabeth and her cavalier ride up to the hall-door steps. They cantered up gaily, Elizabeth laughing and talking in the highest spirits, while Uncle Peter's sternness of visage was relaxed in a look of pleasure that well became him.

"Upon my word, they're a handsome couple!" said Miss Trescott, watching Uncle Peter swing Elizabeth from her saddle with a fatherly air of pride and protection. "And as like as two peas," she added.

"Yes, the resemblance is very striking," sighed mother.

"You're not sorry now, ma'am, that you let the girl carry out her scheme?"

"I'm not sure yet."

"Look at that old man's face. She has made him happy."

"He'd be little obliged to you for calling him an old man," said I.

"Upon my word you're right, my dear; Betty has made him look younger, though he was always a fine hale man. I wonder he didn't marry."

"He was engaged to be married to a girl who died, I believe. I have heard my dear husband speak of it," said mother. "Peter Burton has her picture above his study fire-place, or had when Jasper was a boy. They said then that her memory was as fresh with him as ever."

"I might have known it," said Miss Trescott. "There's

nothing like a touch of sentiment for keeping men—or women, young.”

“He wished Jasper to marry into the same family. That he would not is what he found it so hard to forgive.”

“Ah! so it was not a question of joining money-bags after all,” said Miss Trescott, who loved a bit of romance. “Well, I like him for it, my dear, I like him for it, though the proud, obstinate old man, if he’d only seen you, he’d have understood all and forgiven all. Do you think now, my dear, that he remembers that woman still?”

“From all I’ve heard of his character I should think it extremely likely.”

“Beautiful! beautiful!” cried Miss Trescott. “And yet you would have kept Betty from rescuing that old Paladin out of his loneliness! How old do you suppose he is?”

“Not more than sixty-five, I should say. He was several years younger than the last Lady Burke, my husband’s mother.”

“He’s fresh and hale for it, younger than many a bored man of thirty. Didn’t I say love was the salt of life?”

“You should have married, my dear,” said mother, smiling at her.

“Perhaps—someone was preferred before me. Perhaps—someone thought the world well lost for a chit without

money, or rank, or much beauty even, or much love. Perhaps I was passed over as that other girl was passed over for you."

"Hilda Scovell was her name," said mother. "I always felt grieved that another girl had been passed over for me. But she married afterwards a Mr. Iredale, and left children, so perhaps she was happy. I don't know why Jasper should have preferred me."

"You dear soul, I know why," said Miss Trescott. "But what sentimental stuff we are talking before this child!"

"Joan is very sensible," said mother. "My children know I made a marriage of affection, and that I have strong views on marriages contracted from any other motive. That is not to say that the feelings count for everything, and that everything is to give way to them. If my girls marry, I hope they will marry for love; but they are too sensible to think that the world is made up of love and marriage, too sensible not to postpone thinking about these things till it is time."

"You dear soul!" said Miss Trescott again. "No, you need not be afraid of your girls. They are no sickly sentimentalists; though to forbid a girl to be honestly romantic is to bid her be a hypocrite or a dullard. Betty, now, is really fitted to be a woman of affairs. She hasn't run this place like a hotel manager with a French *chef* and a staff of under-cooks; but she has run it

as a singularly successful hostess might her house. And Joan here, what a wise little woman it is! She must really save you a deal in garden produce and eggs."

"Joan is becoming very efficient," said mother, with her kind smile.

"Of course the little one thinks of nothing but her lover at present; that is only natural. Later on the duties and hard facts of life will come."

"Oh, indeed she thinks of others even now!" said mother, desiring honour for her pet. "I mustn't tell her pretty plans for everyone when she is married, but she plans for everyone; and I believe Kinvarra is as eager as herself."

"She's your own daughter," Miss Trescott said, laughing. "'Twould be no use to deny it."

Just then Uncle Peter came into the room and took up a newspaper and a seat by the fire. I was woman enough to admire the extreme masculinity of his riding-clothes, with the gaiters and all manner of mysterious straps and buckles. Mother hoped timidly that he had enjoyed his ride.

"I'd be hard to please if I hadn't," he said, laying down the newspaper upon his knee. "No man could wish for a braver and brighter companion."

"Elizabeth from a child was remarkably daring, and seemed to ride as if to the manner born," began mother, forgetting in her maternal pride her awe of Uncle

Peter. "When her father bought her her first little pony—"

"Her father," interrupted Uncle Peter, fixing a piercing eye upon mother. "Now what was her father like? It would be from him her spirit came."

He stopped abruptly, noting the change on mother's face, but misreading its cause.

"I beg your pardon, ma'am," he said. "I'm a stupid old fellow, but I didn't mean to give pain. I only meant that—ahem!—the girl wasn't like you."

"Oh, I've lots of spirit, Mr. Burton!" said mother with a faint smile.

Uncle Peter made her a quaint, old-fashioned bow. "You have all the qualities that become your sex," he said. "And your girl adores you. Egad, it must be pleasant to have something of your own to believe in you like that."

"When are you going a-hunting, you and Betty?" broke in Miss Trescott.

"I think I'll take Miss Betty out next Tuesday. There's a meet at Kinvarra Castle they tell me."

"Her sister will be out," said mother.

"Miss Joan?"

"No, my youngest daughter, Delia. Joan has no horse."

Uncle Peter looked at me a minute with a sudden compassionate impulse.

"That's rough on Miss Joan," he said with feeling.

"Never mind, Joan dear. We'll make an expedition of it," said Miss Trescott. "And presently our horse and our prince will come; we won't be always in the background, feeding the fowls and growing cabbages."

"Who rides the little rough pony that's in the box-stall in No. 3 stable?" asked Uncle Peter.

"She belongs to Mr. Thorneycroft. No one rides her at present, the dear little creature, but everyone gives her apples and sugar, which I say is as bad as spoiling a child with sweets all day long. How can you expect her to eat oats and grass afterwards?" said Miss Trescott.

"What's Thorneycroft going to do with her?"

"He bought her for some mysterious lady—a vanishing lady, I suspect. I think he lives in hopes that Joan will break her in for Incognita."

I looked at mother, who shook her head very gently. To ride Uncle Peter's horse was one thing. To ride another gentleman's, even though it was Mr. Thorneycroft's, and Mr. Thorneycroft was like a dear, kind little brother, was plainly another matter.

"We will drive then, Miss Trescott," I said; "we sha'n't be left at home."

"I admire your spirit, Joan, my dear. Will you come, ma'am?" to mother.

Mother declined the proposal, and so it was arranged that we should take the wagonette and all of us drive to

the meet, the horses for the three riders being sent over in charge of Uncle Peter's groom.

It would be quite an outing for me, we lived so quietly, and I was going to enjoy it thoroughly without any envy of my riding sisters.

"Why not make a little expedition of it," suggested mother, "and you and Miss Trescott lunch afterwards with Ellen Langrishe? You will be quite close to her there, and it is a long drive back here from Kinvarra, if you were to do it with only the break of the meet and the hunt breakfast."

"That would be very pleasant," agreed Miss Trescott; so it was arranged that I should write and tell Mrs. Langrishe that we would come to lunch.

I was talking to Elizabeth in her office that afternoon, and admiring the different complexion she had given the place. Father's guns and bits and spurs above the fire-place had all been burnished up. Elizabeth had discovered a set of coloured sporting prints in an attic, and had decorated the walls with them. She had put down a few gaily coloured rugs about the stained floor and added a comfortable chair and a footstool, so that when mother visited her den she might be tempted to stay awhile. Elizabeth's own things were as Spartan as ever, but a jug full of arbutus leaves and berries among the pipes on the mantel-piece, a monthly rose in a little Venetian glass on the high desk, made all the difference.

"I scorn," Elizabeth had said when we rallied her, "I scorn a woman who doesn't impart elegance to her surroundings. What's the good of being a woman else?"

Which question was, no doubt, never meant to be answered.

We were chattering there together when a sharp knock came at the door, and in response to Elizabeth's "Come in", Uncle Peter entered. He had an open letter in his hand, which he kept unfolded as he sat down, declining Elizabeth's easy-chair for one more austere. He looked around him with well-pleased eyes.

"So this is where the business is transacted," he said.

"It looks like a business man's den?" asked Elizabeth anxiously.

"It does indeed. I'll tell you what, my dear. You ought to be the heiress to a large estate or a big business. I can see you managing it all without any rascally or careless middleman intervening. Why didn't you ask me to come here before?"

"I didn't ask you to come here now."

"No more you did. But I've come. I wanted to see you at home. It's just what I'd have expected of you. But I'd business to bring me too. I've a letter here from a young friend of mine, a sort of ward in fact; he wants to join me here. You could take him?"

Elizabeth considered.

"Yes, I think we could take him."

"The question is whether I'll let him come. He's been about with me a good deal has Beaumont—Beaumont Iredale is his name—and a pleasant fellow for a companion. I thought I'd given him the slip."

"But why should you give him the slip?"

He looked at Elizabeth seriously, and his finger still traced a line of the open letter.

"Because he'd fall in love with you, madam."

"And why shouldn't he?" asked Elizabeth, her eyes dancing.

"Because I don't want him to."

Elizabeth jumped up, and made with her skirts what we children used to call a cheese.

"Pray why shouldn't he fall in love with me if he wanted to?" she asked gaily. "Why should you mind?"

"That's just it," said Uncle Peter seriously. "I want him to marry someone else. If he saw you first he'd probably be obstinate—as someone else was."

"It's a great mistake going match-making," said Elizabeth. "There's Kitty Sweeney, and they were going to make her match with old O'Keeffe, and after all she took the affair in her own hands, or Providence did it for her, and she's Mrs. Monahan to-day instead of Mrs. O'Keeffe. But I forget you don't know anything about Kitty's match-making. You must get Joan to tell you."

"The only time I ever tried to make a match it didn't come off, and trouble followed."

"It was sure to," said Elizabeth.

"And now I want to make another to undo that old trouble."

"Let people make their own matches."

"I won't let Beaumont Iredale make his. Would he take maybe a plain girl after seeing you?"

"Would I take him, do you suppose?"

"You might. Beaumont's a handsome and a pleasant lad. I won't leave Beaumont out in the cold. But I want to leave the money where it ought to go."

He spoke to himself rather than to us, and neither of us answered him; his next speech was like a thunderbolt.

"I wish to heaven you were a Burke!" he said to Elizabeth with the most startling energy.

Even Elizabeth was stricken dumb, and sat looking at Uncle Peter with a very guilty expression.

"Where are they, those Burkes? When am I to see them?"

"Patience," murmured Elizabeth. "You shall see them soon."

"A pack of gawky girls," he fretted. "Why can't they be like you?"

"Maybe they are not so unlike," said Elizabeth, with the old light coming into her eye and the mischievous smile to her lips.

Uncle Peter ignored her remark.

"I shall tell Beaumont you can't have him."

"That will be a story. Let him come. I shall promise to say 'No' to him if you like."

"I won't have my boy's heart played ducks and drakes with."

"Why should he not fall in love with Miss Burke?"

"He will not if he sees you first."

"That would be no hindrance," said Elizabeth airily.

I had sat meanwhile pulling nervously at my handkerchief, and turning hot and cold. If Elizabeth enjoyed this sort of thing certainly I did not. Every time Uncle Peter's mouth opened I expected him to ask a direct question which Elizabeth's wit could not evade, and I knew she would not tell him a lie to save the situation.

He left us, declaring that he would write and bid Beaumont stop at home.

"I believe you like it, Betty," I cried in despair, as soon as the door had closed behind him.

"I believe I do, Joan," she answered. "Skating on thin ice, where the danger-boards are up, is so exhilarating."

"Why don't you tell him? He would forgive you."

"I want him to forgive mother perfectly. I want him to find out for himself what a dear saint she is. If he could see that, I should make a clean breast. But mother avoids him. She will not let him know her."

"It is a false position. He will never know her while it lasts."

"But I shall teach him to see her with my eyes, with our eyes. I believe he detests the hypothetical mother still. Once he sees her as I see her, I will confess. The delay is for mother, Joan, don't you see? for mother."

CHAPTER XXIII.

DISCOVERY.

TUESDAY morning was gray and mild, an ideal day, said Uncle Peter, for a good scent and a sure find. We were off early, for Kinvarra Castle was a good hour's drive from us, and the start was at eleven o'clock. We went in great spirits. If now and then a little qualm seized me lest Elizabeth's secret should be discovered, I put it away from me. Elizabeth had been extremely lucky heretofore, and Uncle Peter had shown what I could not help thinking an obtuseness about the matter that was our best ally. Why, to anyone of quick perceptions we had betrayed ourselves over and over again.

I also placed hope in Uncle Peter's English reserve. He was very slow to make friends with our friends, though Elizabeth had melted him so quickly. He had a way of standing apart from unknown or little known people, so that during the weeks he had been hunting in our extremely friendly country he did not seem to have made even an acquaintance. So the odds were

really in favour of Elizabeth, and as for Elizabeth herself she did not look as if a misgiving could approach her.

She wore the new riding-habit and a smart little felt hat, with an eagle's feather which Larry Monahan had found long ago under Slieve Roe and had presented to her. With her neat tie and riding-gloves and the little golden-headed switch which Uncle Peter had given her, she looked as business-like and beautiful an Amazon as could be desired.

On the lawn in front of Kinvarra Castle, a gray old building with two wings, which, advancing in front of the house, enclosed a sort of courtyard, the huntsman was standing with his horse's reins over one arm and his eager hounds leaping and straining about him. We were comparatively early, and as we drew up on the gravel-sweep in front of the house the scarlet-coated horsemen about were continually receiving additions to their numbers, whilst ladies in their black habits, demurely smart, with their fresh, fair faces and shining hair, made a pleasant diversion from the male brilliancy of apparel.

As we drove up Lord Kinvarra advanced to meet us. He had been standing bareheaded talking to the master, who was the centre of an alert group, all discussing the chances of the hunting.

Looking away to the left under a clump of laurels I

saw Uncle Peter's groom, Ferris, holding the bridles of the three horses. Delia's little pony in the middle was evidently engaged in a game of coquetry with the two tall hunters.

Here and there a black habit was surrounded by a ring of scarlet coats. One such circle widening revealed to me Georgie O'Hara flinging jests gaily about her and looking the last girl in the world to be saddened by an unhappy love affair.

"Who is she?" Uncle Peter asked, indicating Georgie with his whip.

"Georgie O'Hara, a great friend of ours. And that girl there by the master is her sister Madge. Her engagement to the master has just been announced."

"Ah," said Uncle Peter with a sigh, "I had a half hope the name might be Burke. They aren't Betties, but they look clean, sweet, wholesome girls for all that."

"Would you have all the beauty of the country monopolized by the Burkes, sir?" said Sir Andrew Blake, who had just come up and was paying Elizabeth compliments.

Uncle Peter stared at him mystified, but Lord Kinvarra saved the situation.

"You'll come in and see what an Irish hunt breakfast is like, Mr. Burton," he said. "And who else is coming?"

I longed to see a hunt breakfast myself, but I would not go in lest someone should call me Miss Burke in the

hearing of Uncle Peter. Even if the worst came to the worst while Elizabeth was present, the brunt of the discovery would not fall upon me. I am a shameful coward, but I confess I dared not risk being withered by Uncle Peter's anger. I trusted Elizabeth to carry off the worst fiasco possible with dignity and courage.

Miss Trescott avowed that she was hungry and could eat a slice of cold beef, so she and Uncle Peter went off together.

"Now," said I to Kinvarra, who came back in an instant and stood by the wagonette looking at Delia, "if they could only all come up together and address us by the dreaded name all at once, or, if Miss Trescott could only keep Uncle Peter within there till the master gives the signal!"

"She is doing her best," said Kinvarra, smiling. "I have never heard a lady ask for so many things to eat at once. If she goes through her menu, and can keep Mr. Burton beside her, the situation is safe for another day. He was attending assiduously to her many wants when I left. But I expect the lodestar of Betty's eyes will draw him back. Why don't you own up, Betty? The old gentleman is completely in your toils."

"Never you mind, Kinvarra. If you are to be my brother-in-law that doesn't say you know my business better than myself."

Kinvarra laughed. He and Elizabeth were on those

terms in which good-will expresses itself by a constant succession of playful skirmishes.

"Ah, here is Gilsenan," he said, as the portly form of the butler approached. "Since Mahomet wouldn't come to the mountain, etcetera."

Gilsenan carried a salver with some dainty sandwiches, a decanter of sherry, and glasses.

"If you think I am going to let you hunt on the sort of breakfast you've had this morning, little woman!" Kinvarra said to Delia, spreading a table-napkin on her knee.

While we were enjoying our little meal, a good many horsemen gathered about us. Presently I found Georgie O'Hara at my elbow.

"You've heard about Madge?" she whispered.

"Yes. I suppose you are all delighted. The master looks radiant."

"He carries his heart on his sleeve, doesn't he? Did you ever see a pair look so ridiculously happy? It is the way of things, Joan. Some people have only to wish for the moon and it falls into their laps. Madge is a good old sort anyhow; she deserves to be happy."

"Everyone is pleased?"

"Dad and the mother are as proud as Punch. Only now and again dad looks at me as though he thought all the rejoicings weren't quite fair to me. Poor old dad, and poor Madge! As if I should grudge Madge her

slice of cake because mine was denied me, because there never was any cake for me in fact. What do you think, Joan?"

"I'm sure you wouldn't, Georgie. What news from Khansore?"

"Tom is still in high favour with the rajah, and rather expecting to be poisoned by the court physician because of the official jealousy. What news have you, Joan?"

"None."

"Ah, well, none's better than bad. But here's the master coming up to be congratulated. He expects everyone to do it, Joan. I make fun of him from morning till night, but he likes it, Joan, he positively likes it. Here's your little friend Thorneycroft. When are you going to put him out of pain, Joan?"

I turned to look at Mr. Thorneycroft, who was riding up the avenue on a very tall hunter.

"He doesn't look in pain, Georgie."

"He doesn't. That's the touching thing about him. He's head over ears in love with you, as everyone knows. You never give him the slightest encouragement, and I don't believe he ever expects you to. Yet there he is, always ready to do anything for you, the best of good friends and good fellows and good sportsmen, if he is diminutive. Heigho, 'tis a troubled world, Joan, my dear!"

The lawn was now crowded, and I saw the master, who had accepted our congratulations with pleased affability, look at his watch. Kinvarra had helped Delia out of the wagonette, and had returned in time to touch Elizabeth's hand as she sprang down with the skirt of her habit gathered up in one hand. I was alone in the wagonette now, but Georgie O'Hara remained by me, and we were silent an instant, watching the crowd of red-coated men gathered about my sisters and their steeds.

"Her pony suits Delia perfectly," said Georgie; "they are both such little wild things. Doesn't Delia look like a little school-girl going for a ride on her pony? It's ridiculous to think of her being married."

I put out my hand to smoothe the coat of Georgie's satin-skinned bay.

"And Vixen is not unlike you, Georgie," I said. "You really have much the same complexions. But why Vixen?"

"Because she's the sweetest-tempered mare in Galway," Georgie said, laughing.

"Are you going to get the brush, Georgie?"

"I very much doubt it. I'll leave it for Betty. It would be great *éclat* to carry off the brush her first day out. I can't take any risks any more, Joan. Now that Madge is going to be married the old people depend on me. Yes, Joan, you needn't open your eyes at me. It

is just as well Tom Crosby elected to go to Khansore alone, though I would have taken all the chances. One of us must stay with the dad and the mater."

At this moment Uncle Peter helped Miss Trescott into the wagonette.

"I've enjoyed myself immensely, Joan," the lady said, laughing, "and ate a huge breakfast, though Mr. Burton was visibly impatient."

"I trust not, madam," said Uncle Peter with old-fashioned politeness. "It's pleasant to see ladies eat well, though it wasn't thought to be the thing in my young manhood."

"I dare say, sir. Many a fine young girl slipped into a decline for want of proper sustenance, because it wasn't genteel to eat. Not that I know anything except by hearsay," with a humorous twinkle of her eye, "I belong to the present age, you see."

Uncle Peter turned from us with a bow.

"Excuse me," he said; "we must be going if Miss Betty's to be in the front."

Elizabeth indeed was looking round for him. Half a dozen young fellows had pressed forward to help her to mount. Kinvarra had already put Delia into her saddle. I saw Elizabeth stand, ready, but she looked away from them all to Uncle Peter. His face softened as he responded to the invitation in her smile. She put one foot in his extended palm, the other in the stirrup, and was



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'GENTLEMEN,' HE SAID. . . . 'THE OLD MEN SCORE SOMETIMES''

up. Uncle Peter looked round with a smile that said he was proud of his pupil. Indeed he came out of his reserve to make a jest.

"Gentlemen," he said to the circle standing about, "the old men score sometimes."

The young men laughed good-humouredly, and one of them murmured something about Uncle Peter deserving his good luck. Then there was a scurry to mount among those who had dismounted, for the master was seen riding out side by side with the huntsman, who was cracking his whip and shouting to his dogs.

"What a meal I've eaten for Betty's sake!" whispered Miss Trescott to me. "I sha'n't be able to look at lunch. But I don't grudge it. The danger is well over."

But was it?

Just as Elizabeth and Uncle Peter rode out side by side to join the crowd that was pressing behind the master, Mr. O'Hara and Georgie came up alongside them. Mr. O'Hara is the dearest of old men; but as Georgie has always said, if there is a *mal-à-propos* thing to be done or said, that dear courtly old man is sure to blunder into it. I confess to a qualm as I saw his roan and Elizabeth's jet side by side.

There was an instant's pause. A mail phaeton was being turned in the avenue and the way was blocked.

"I couldn't get near you before, Miss Betty," rang out Mr. O'Hara's cheery voice. "I couldn't usurp the

young fellows' privileges. But let me say, even so late in the day, how glad I am to welcome Jasper Burke's daughter to a field her father so well adorned."

Elizabeth stooped almost to her saddle-bow, like someone who has received a blow. Then she sat suddenly upright. She never looked at Uncle Peter, but her hand nervously closed hard on her whip as she answered Mr. O'Hara with a smile that quite deceived the poor gentleman. The way was clear now, and he rode off with Georgie, utterly unconscious of the horrible situation in which he had placed us all.

I watched Uncle Peter's face furtively. At first he had stared at Mr. O'Hara's benevolent countenance as though he thought he had suddenly gone mad. Then his gaze travelled on to Elizabeth, and illumination, a shocked illumination, appeared through the bewilderment on his face.

"He said — Jasper Burke," he half muttered, turning to Elizabeth. "Are you Jasper Burke's daughter?"

"I meant to have told you," said Elizabeth.

"Ah, you meant to have told me!" he said, and his voice was cold.

Then he touched his horse with the whip. The momentary pause was over. He and Elizabeth moved out side by side. As they rode down the avenue the sun came out and glinted merrily on the scarlet coats and on the steel and silver of spurs and harness. The

house was on a hill, and presently the field came in sight, emerging from the shadow of trees into an open space. We heard the hounds giving tongue, and in a second the field was streaming away, a long line of black and scarlet, hard on the heels of the dogs.

Through my glass I could pick out Uncle Peter by the homespuns he was wearing. He and Betty were still side by side.

"He can't be so angry after all," said Miss Trescott uneasily, as I told her the result of my observations.

"Alas!" said I, "I'm afraid he is furiously angry. He will take care of Betty just the same, of course. But I am dreadfully sorry for her. And she was looking forward so much to this day."

"Don't look like a detected criminal, Joan," said Miss Trescott. "When you have lived as long as I have, child, you will find a *contretemps* like this disagreeable, but not tragic."

"Ah!" I said. We were out on the road by this time, and Miss Trescott was handling the ribbons in great style. "I might have known it would happen. I wish Betty had told him."

For all at once it had come upon me how this piratical attempt to engage his affections might—nay must—look to Uncle Peter.

"My dear," said Miss Trescott cheerfully, "he loves her and he will forgive her."

"I am afraid," I answered, "that he may find his loving her the hardest thing of all to forgive."

CHAPTER XXIV.

CAPITULATION.

I WAS persuaded against my judgment," said mother, "but my poor girl meant well. I should not have permitted it."

"Dear," said I, "it was taken out of your hands. Betty took all the initial steps without consulting you. You couldn't very well have turned Uncle Peter out into the night that evening he arrived."

"I suppose not; but I should have insisted upon Elizabeth's being candid with him, especially when I saw how fond he was becoming of her. I wonder why she did not tell him."

"Because of you. There was still a Lady Burke in his mind whom he could hardly forgive. Betty's siege of his heart was quickly over. You—you kept away from him: he hardly knew you, though he took you on faith. She wanted him to see you with the eyes of her own ardent love."

"My Betty! If I should block her way! Anyhow I am going to defend her against Peter Burton."

"There!" said Miss Trescott. "If the man could see

you he wouldn't need to ask where Elizabeth got her spirit."

"I am naturally of a violent disposition," said mother, "but I have been given grace to overcome it."

We could not help smiling at each other; but the smile was tender because we loved her.

"I won't have Peter Burton scold my girl," mother went on. "He may feel as he likes about me, but he must do justice to my Bet."

She looked, too, as if she were quite capable of enforcing her will.

"I am only afraid," said I, "lest he should think we wanted his money."

"He would never think that," said mother in a shocked way.

"I'm afraid it is the most likely thing for him to think," said I.

"Have you ordered a very substantial tea?" asked mother; "they will be hungry."

"I have had theirs set in the dining-room. I told Nuala to put on the cold ham and fo l, and plenty of cream, butter, and honey. She is making hot griddle-cakes, too. Poor Nuala, she will be dreadfully upset if Uncle Peter proves unforgiving."

"Perhaps they'll come home the best of friends," said Miss Trescott hopefully. "Elizabeth has had a day in which to get round him. I pin mv faith to Bet."

"Perhaps they'll toast their future friendship in strong tea, with lots of cream in it, but I doubt it," said I.

"Bless the child!" said Miss Trescott irritably; "she always expects the worst to happen."

"Joan took rather a hopeless view of things from the time she was a little girl," began mother. "I remember when she was three years old—"

But the reminiscence was lost, for we heard the horses' feet on the gravel outside, and I sprang to the window in time to see Uncle Peter lift Betty to the ground.

"I can't tell whether they are friends or not," I said, coming back. "But, by the way, my hopelessness, as you call it, is only a reaction from the over-sanguine temperament of my family."

"Are you thinking of that still, child?" said Miss Trescott. "Hush, they are coming in here."

Mother stood up, with one hand on the arm of her chair, looking ready to defend Elizabeth against the world, but the footsteps passed on.

"They are gone to their rooms," said mother, sitting down again.

"I will go to Elizabeth and learn what has happened," I said.

I ran upstairs to my sister's bedroom. She was taking off her habit with an air of fatigue, and the minute I saw her I felt things had not gone well. I helped her off with the tight-fitting habit, fetched her her tea-gown

and slippers, and helped her into them, but asked no questions. Elizabeth liked to bide her own time, and if she wasn't quick about telling me it didn't often happen to her, but her silence seemed ominous.

"It is a comfort with you, Joan," she said, "that you don't bother."

"How did you enjoy the hunting?"

"It was horrible. It would have been lovely under other circumstances. I was in the first flight. I didn't get the brush, of course. Ugh! I hope I never shall. But this fine fox saved his tail, I'm glad to say. There was no kill."

"Well?"

"Well, except for mere verbal instructions, he hasn't spoken to me all day."

"Poor Bet! What is he going to do?"

"Ask for his bill, I expect."

"And you?"

"Going to fight to win him back. It was a horrible blunder; and I confess this day of dumb riding has made me feel pretty bad. Besides, I'm hungry. But I shall make a stiff fight."

"Come and have something to eat. There's a substantial meal in the dining-room, and I've put back dinner till nine o'clock."

"Good old Joan, you always think of things. He must be starving too. Let us send for him."

"You're going to have it out with him?"

"When we have both eaten. A full man is better than a starving man. Doesn't someone say that?"

"Shall you have it out over the tea-table?"

"The sooner I do it the better. The being obliged to put it off has fretted me all day. We were pounding away so hard, there was no chance; and Uncle Peter was so deadly polite."

"You don't want spectators?"

"You, Joan; you shall sit there quietly in your corner, and pick me up if Uncle Peter murders me entirely, as the people say. Come along, I want it to be finished one way or the other."

She had put on the pink tea-gown which she had worn the evening of Uncle Peter's arrival, and she had set her godmother's diamond star in her hair. One could always count on Elizabeth's rising for an emergency, and now she sparkled with her old brilliancy as we went down the stairs.

"You ought to marry a cabinet minister, Betty," I said, thrusting my arm through hers.

"Why, Joan?"

"Because you'd look so fine holding receptions."

"I shall not even marry Beaumont Iredale," said Elizabeth, with a laugh that was slightly rueful. "I shall head a tableful of paying guests all the days of my life, more likely."

The dining-room was cheerful, with its red curtains drawn closely, the fire sputtering and crackling, and the little lamp hissing under the copper urn.

Elizabeth made tea—hot, strong, and sweet—as Uncle Peter liked it.

“I ought to be making his tea every morning I live,” she said. “Joan, just touch the bell, and ask Rose to tell Uncle Peter the tea is made.”

I sent the message, and then returned to carve for two hungry people. I hemmed Uncle Peter’s plate around with delicacies, with a half hope that so I should mollify him, while Elizabeth watched me with a smile that told she guessed at what was going on in my mind. When at last Uncle Peter’s heavy steps sounded on the stairs, I fled into my corner, and sat with a fan of peacock’s feathers shading my face.

Uncle Peter came in and sat down without a word. He took the tea from Elizabeth’s hand with a cold word of thanks. Watching him, I was glad to see that he ate well. He had the appetite of a hunter, and it comforted me to see him eat. He could not be so unapproachable after a full meal as when he stood in need of one.

The meal was eaten in silence, and I think Uncle Peter would have departed in silence if Elizabeth had permitted him, but as soon as he had laid down his table-napkin, she asked:

“What are you going to do?”

"Tell my man to pack," he replied grimly. "I leave to-morrow morning. If you will be good enough to have my bill made out—"

"You have no bill," said Elizabeth, with an angry flush rising in her dark cheeks.

"No bill! What do you mean?"

"The Burkes can still entertain their kinsfolk without reward."

"Immediate, you mean," he said with a sneer. "I did not come to the house of the Burkes; I came to the house of a Mrs. Franklin, who receives—what is the ridiculous phrase?—paying guests."

"We grew poorer and poorer," said Elizabeth patiently. "We had to earn money somehow. It seemed the easiest way, especially as our friend, Mrs. Langrishe, had shown us the way. We called ourselves Franklin, because mother was timid and proud, and was never reconciled to the idea. Franklin was her mother's name. It did not seem a falsehood for her to wear it."

"She permitted this undignified masquerade? Why, every soul in the house, and your friends as well as yourselves, must have conspired to trick me."

"Mother hated it. I overbore her. I knew, or thought I knew, that you would not have come to us, or remained with us, if you knew who we were."

"You overreached yourself. I would have come in a natural, ordinary way if you had given me time."

"You would have sought us out?"

"I would have sought you out, against my will, I confess. If I had followed only my will, I would have made Beaumont Iredale my heir, as he is already my son in affection. But something—troublesome within myself—urged me to find out if Jasper Burke's children were in need. I came here—to spy out the land. If they were not in need, if they were prosperous, I could have followed my own inclinations."

"You can follow them now."

"It does not matter about the money," Uncle Peter said, waving her words away from him. "Beaumont has enough. I shall give you what I think fitting, enough for you to live as my sister's grandchildren ought to live. The trick you have played me does not alter that. You expected more, no doubt."

His voice was full of coldness and disbelief. Knowing Elizabeth's pride, I expected her to answer him with scorn equal to his own. Indeed I would have done it myself if I had not accepted her as a better spokeswoman. To my amazement, then, Elizabeth bent forward, and said in a thrilling voice:

"Uncle Peter!"

"Why do you call me that?" he interrupted harshly.

"I have always called you that, when you were not listening. Leave your money to whom you will. What do I care! You ought to know my father's daughter is

no fortune-hunter. Listen! We refuse your money. I refuse it, for myself and my sisters. My mother also will refuse it. Put it beyond our power ever to have it. Then let me begin again and win your love!"

He stared at her incredulously. Honest passion was written on her face, and, looking at it, his own worked.

"If I could believe it, Bet!" he said.

"Believe it—believe that I trapped you here, not because you were Uncle Peter, the rich man, but because you were my kinsman, and I thought of you as lonely and angry. It was stupid of me. Someone—Joan, was it?—reminded me that the rich need never be lonely."

The cloud of suspicion on his face lifted a little.

"I wish it had been any other way, Bet. If there had been none of this wretched deception, I could have loved you and been proud of you."

"It looks a wretched deception from your side of it, Uncle Peter," pleaded Elizabeth. "From my side—and other honourable people thought it so—it was an innocent and excusable scheme to win an unforgiving uncle to forgiveness. I thought if you knew me, not as the child of the nephew who had opposed you, and with whom you had quarrelled, but as a stranger, that I could make you love me. I was always so sure of myself."

I hardly knew Elizabeth in this new phase of humility.

"It is the hardest thing to forgive," said Uncle Peter

in a low voice, "that you succeeded. The old do not love easily."

"I loved you too," said Elizabeth, seeing her advantage and pressing it. "Tie up your money how you will, Uncle Peter; we don't want it. But forgive me."

"If I could believe you!"

I wondered how he could look at her and not believe her. She felt his suspicion bitterly, but she showed no impatience, though the red which had been flickering in her cheeks settled there in two deep spots.

"It is intolerable that you should think I want your money," she said, "but my own folly has left me open to it. I am of your kin. Look in your heart and say if a feeling for kindred may not count as well as love of money. Besides, I have always been proud and self-confident. I thought I could win you back, even after all those years."

Uncle Peter stared at her.

"Why," he said to himself, "the Burtons have always held together, and the girl is a Burton. It was written in her face, if age had not made me dull."

"Tie up your money away from us," urged Elizabeth.

"I shall leave it to Beaumont," he said. "I have always wanted to leave it to Beaumont; and to make sure against repentance, I will give it to him now in my lifetime, only retaining enough to buy me a life-annuity. There will be no turning back, Betty."

"But you will forgive me," said Elizabeth, as though she had not heard the rest.

"I will forgive you."

"Really, really forgive!" urged Elizabeth, going to him and putting her hands fearlessly on his shoulders. "Not coldly forgive me only, but reinstate me. Put me back where I was in your heart; love me, be proud of me."

Uncle Peter's face changed, and in the lamplight I actually thought his eyes were moist.

"There," he said, "you are my own Betty after all."

"And you take back all the bitter things you said?"

"Wounded love is most like to be bitter, child."

"Let the bitterness go."

"And the love remain. But I shall leave my money to Beaumont."

"Bother your old money!" said Elizabeth disrespectfully. "You think a deal more of it than anyone else does."

Then I got up to go and tell mother it was all right. It was only then that Uncle Peter discovered my presence.

"Well, Joan," he said, "and you are another of my nieces." Then shamefacedly, "She has made me forgive her too easily."

"You would not have forgiven me half so easily."

"Perhaps not. She is irresistible. I suppose I must forgive your mother too."

"Little mother!" said Elizabeth. "As if anyone could have anything to forgive her for!"

Then I went out and left them.

CHAPTER XXV.

ELIZABETH, VICTRIX.

SO once more Elizabeth reigned triumphantly in Uncle Peter's affections, and there was like to be an end to Elizabeth as a woman of business, for Uncle Peter claimed her as his own.

His *amende* to mother was very pleasant. He took his seat by her in the drawing-room immediately after dinner that evening of Elizabeth's memorable first hunting day, and said he—under cover of the music, for Elizabeth was playing something that sounded like a song of triumph, and Mr. Thorneycroft was turning over her music:

"Madam, may I hope to be forgiven for the wrong-headedness and dullness of years?"

"My husband forgave you and loved you to the end," said mother, with the tears starting in her eyes. "As for me, I need forgiveness for having come between two who loved each other so well."

I stood up to leave them together, but mother took my hand and gently put me in my chair again.

"You don't mind Joan, sir?" she said. "When you know us better you will know that Joan has all our secrets."

"I don't mind Joan," said Uncle Peter, with the air of doing something very handsome. "Hang it all, ma'am, when I've been in the wrong, which I'm bound to say doesn't happen often, I don't mind confessing it before all the world."

"Jasper loved you to the end," said mother.

Uncle Peter used his handkerchief vigorously.

"It is well," he said, "that Infinite Mercy gives us another world in which to make up for the sins and follies of this."

"He was angry once, believing you misjudged me," said mother simply. "But his anger had long passed away. He would have approached you in the latter years, only your—your wealth blocked the way. Jasper had the Irish pride. He feared it might be said or thought that he approached you because you were rich."

"God bless me!" said Uncle Peter, "who would think a thought so mean? Besides, mayn't I be loved for myself?"

"That is what Elizabeth said."

"So she did. Why, look you here, ma'am. My own temper, my own wilfulness, have made a quarter of my life wasted with regrets and desires after my kindred.

But for that young woman's brains and heart and courage I might have gone down into the grave without one of my own blood near me. Upon my word, ma'am, I'm obliged to you, the world's obliged to you, for having given it such a lovely creature."

"I am grateful to you for loving Elizabeth."

"Grateful, ma'am! Who could help it? Who could look on that girl and not love her? Your other daughters are all very well, all very well, a credit to you, in fact; but there's only one Betty."

Mother patted my hand very softly to soothe my wounded feelings, but I wasn't conscious of hurt. I liked Uncle Peter's complacent affection for Elizabeth, and was rejoiced that things were turning out so well.

"I couldn't help thinking this evening," Uncle Peter went on, "when she soothed this old bear with her beautiful humility—"

"Humility!" said mother. "We have never thought Elizabeth humble."

"You don't know her, ma'am—her beautiful humility I repeat. I couldn't help thinking, when she drew me out of my low thoughts of myself, that she inherits her humility from me, for it is always difficult for me to believe that anyone cares about me—"

"We have never found it so with Elizabeth," said mother, surprised into interrupting him again.

"You don't know the girl, ma'am. But if Jasper could

only have borne with me like that, drawn me out of myself like that!"

Again Uncle Peter used his handkerchief vigorously.

"Thank God," said mother reverently, repeating his thought almost in his words, "that there is another chance for us, a world in which the mistakes of this can be set right."

Uncle Peter lifted her hand to his lips.

"Jasper was right," he said, "and I was an overbearing old fool. Forgive me, my dear niece."

Then he changed the subject with the utmost briskness.

"And now, ma'am," he said, "Betty's game here has been played, and well played. But it is over. I have been thinking about things. You will have no more people who pay for their keep."

Mother winced, and Uncle Peter noticing it, patted her shoulder kindly.

"It is no disgrace to earn money honestly," he said. "The Burtons came from a gypsy lad at the pit's brow. Am I one to give myself airs?"

"That is where Elizabeth derives her business capacity," said mother, smiling again.

"And her adventurousness," said Uncle Peter, "and her beauty, and her wit. I may say in all humility that these things have belonged always to our family. I am going to have Betty painted by Sargent. It will be an immortal thing, and in days to come it will rank with

the Reynoldses and Gainsboroughs. Betty in a big hat and a primrose silk frock. I can see her now, and how the crowds will gather about her at the Academy."

Mother looked alarmed.

"I should not like a girl of mine to be too much of this world," she said.

"But her virtue, ma'am," said Uncle Peter, as if he had made no divergence. "Her virtue plainly derives from you."

"I am glad you think Betty has so much of me," said mother, faintly smiling.

"Tell me," said Uncle Peter, "what will you do with that woman over there?" nodding towards Miss Trescott, who was reading *The Queen* by the light of a shaded lamp at the other side of the room. "She's a very pleasant woman, but she'll have to go. And the young gentleman there by Betty. He'll have to go too. He's not thinking of Betty?"

The question was asked with such sudden fierceness that mother jumped.

"It is the last thing in the world I should suspect in Mr. Thorneycroft," she answered, recovering herself.

"He'd better not," said Uncle Peter, directing a ferocious look at Mr. Thorneycroft's innocent back.

"I'm sure he never thought of such a thing," said mother.

"If I believed he had, I'd kick him out this instant.

It is a disgraceful thing, a most ungentlemanly thing, upon my word, to try and engage the affections of a young lady before she has seen anything of the world, before she has had a chance of meeting those who would naturally be the fit and proper mates for her."

"I am sure Mr. Thorneycroft has never thought of Elizabeth in that way," said mother.

She put her hand on Uncle Peter's arm, and her touch and her voice seemed to quell the rage that was rising in him.

"Well then, ma'am," he said; "I admire the young gentleman's discretion—I wouldn't have stood any nonsense, I tell you plainly,—but where are his eyes? Bet tells me he's a good sportsman, and a good fellow all round; but if he's been shut up here all the winter and hasn't fallen in love with Betty, he's a dull dog."

"Perhaps his affections are engaged elsewhere," suggested mother.

"You mean one of your other daughters, ma'am," said Uncle Peter with a sudden loss of interest.

"Indeed I don't," said mother hastily. "Delia is to marry Lord Kinvarra. It is against my will that my little girl should marry so early, but they have settled it between them. And Joan doesn't think of such things yet."

"I'm not so sure of that," chuckled Uncle Peter. "My niece Joan is a very pleasing young lady, though not

a patch on Betty—it isn't to be expected;—but don't tell me that the young fellows' eyes haven't been telling Miss Joan that she's very pretty—if she isn't Betty."

"I am going to wait, Uncle Peter," said I demurely, "till Betty has made her selection from princes of the blood, dukes, marquises, and the higher nobility, and then I may fall in for the least eligible of the rejected."

Uncle Peter stared at me in amazement, and then drew himself up, leaning both hands on his knees.

"Why, she's got Burton spirit," he cried, "and Burton wit."

"And my virtues," added mother, with the same faint smile with which she had heard herself accredited as the transmitter of Elizabeth's virtues.

"We must take care of Joan," said Uncle Peter. "She's run out of my way up to this, like yourself, ma'am. I used to feel as if I were an old cat come into a room where mice were playing."

"We are afraid of you no longer," said mother.

"We must take care of Joan," repeated Uncle Peter. "I'm interested in Joan. But Miss—Trescott, is it? What will you do with her?"

Mother looked perplexed.

"She vows she will never leave us."

"She'll have to go, or stay as a visitor. And the young gentleman too."

"Poor Mr. Thorneycroft!" said mother; "he had become quite one of ourselves."

"He'd better take a place here and settle down. He's a Thorneycroft of Islip, Lincolnshire, isn't he? A younger son's son, but he must have money. Let him buy a place here and take an Irish wife. What about that brown-haired girl with the white teeth, who rides so well? Why doesn't he marry her?"

"He means Georgie O'Hara," I said in reply to mother's questioning look.

"Oh, Georgie! I think he and Georgie hardly know each other. I'm sure they're not thinking of each other," said mother.

Uncle Peter smiled a pleased retrospective smile.

"Only a few hours ago I was half hoping she might be a Burke. I dreaded those girls, upon my word I did. I believe I'd have wronged them for Bet if she hadn't turned out to be a Burke. I shall wake up in the night and think I have only dreamt that Betty is Jasper's daughter, and pinch myself to make sure it isn't only a good dream. Upon my word, ma'am, since I've been here I'd grown to hate those poor nieces of mine."

"It's well they didn't exist, poor girls," said mother compassionately.

"They'd have found themselves disinherited if they had," said Uncle Peter grimly. "They were sure to be dull and plain-looking."

"We must consult Miss Trescott," said mother, looking over at the reading lady.

"About whether she'll go or not?" said I. "She won't go."

"We must establish a *modus vivendi*," said Uncle Peter. "What about the young fellow?"

"He won't be as difficult a nut to crack as Miss Trescott," I said, with an odd sensation of pain. "I think he'll turn out on the slightest hint, though he says he's never been so happy before in his life. I think he'll pitch his tent with Kinvarra for a time. Kinvarra is always wanting him to stay with him."

"The little one's arranged things for herself," said Uncle Peter regretfully. "It seems a very suitable marriage; but I should have liked to provide for Jasper's three girls."

I didn't like to ask Uncle Peter if it was out of the life-annuity, and could only conclude that he had forgotten his avowed intentions about the money. But his next remark put it out of my head.

"Are you much attached to this place, ma'am?" he asked.

"We've been happy at Ardeelish, haven't we, Joan?" mother said.

"You like it better than the other place? Derrymore—that's its name, isn't it?"

Mother looked at Uncle Peter with parted lips.

"Derrymore is a great place," she said, "and expensive to keep up."

"How long has the man's lease to run?"

"Two years now. It is renewable every five years. Jasper arranged it so. He always hoped he might go back."

"Poor lad!" said Uncle Peter with feeling. "I would to heaven he might have gone back!"

Mother's eyes swam in tears, but Uncle Peter, with a change of tone, went on briskly:

"I'll buy out his two years. Or if he won't sell I must possess my soul in patience. I can afford to keep up an Irish country house. Wolf's Crag is a bit too fine for me now and again."

"You would put us back in Derrymore?"

"Unless you'd rather stay here. I want the place for Betty. Betty's to be my heiress. There won't be many girls better off."

"Money is a serious responsibility," said mother, with no sign of elation.

"And a great means of doing good," replied Uncle Peter. "With her inheritance of my business qualities and your charity, Betty will know how to administer my fortune when it comes to her hands."

"Young hands," sighed mother, "to accept such a trust."

"But capable; and there'll be many a one ready to halve the responsibility. But I'll have no fortune-

hunters, mind; I'll have no fortune-hunters!" said Uncle Peter, glaring at the furniture as though he expected to find impecunious gentlemen under sofas and behind window-curtains.

"Now, what are you saying?" cried Elizabeth, jumping up from the piano and coming over to our group. "You are so noisy that you broke in on my *Berceuse*. Are you scolding me, pray?"

She put her head on one side, and looked up bewitchingly in Uncle Peter's face.

He took her hands and held her at arm's length.

"I was only saying that you were to be my heiress," he said.

"Rubbish!" said Elizabeth; "found a cats' home with the money."

"You can do that if you will. Will you have me thrown in with the fortune?"

"I won't have the fortune without."

"You will take the head of my table?"

"Mother!" cried Elizabeth, suddenly alarmed.

"She shall be there if she will. You must persuade her. Also," said Uncle Peter, "if my dear niece will be so kind as to extend an invitation to this house to my young friend, Mr. Beaumont Iredale, it would be a pleasure to me to make him acquainted with my great-nieces."

CHAPTER XXVI.

A BIRTHDAY.

MY birthday comes in March, "When daffodils begin to peer"; and broke in torrents of rain that year. It had rained well-nigh incessantly through February, making up for the dry winter, and "March, many weathers" seemed like to be deadly monotonous in this same matter of rain.

Things were much the same in March as they had been in January, except that Mr. Thorneycroft was on a long visit to Lord Kinvarra, who professed to find the year of probation hard, though it seemed to me that if people were happy, approved lovers, seeing each other every day, that ought to be enough for mere mortal happiness.

Miss Trescott was with us still. As I thought she would, she had absolutely declined to leave, though she paid us no longer for food and shelter.

"I shall make it up some other way," she had said, "though it's not so easy now, seeing that you are all in the lap of fortune."

And it was true, for Uncle Peter had secured mother a handsome income, lest, as he said, he should quarrel with Betty after all; which was only his jesting way to cover his generosity in making mother independent of him or anyone.

Beaumont Iredale had been more than a month with us. We all liked him, a pleasant, frank-faced, ruddy boy, whose chief interest in life up to the present seemed to have been games. He might only have left Eton yesterday to hear his talk of goals and scrimmages.

"It is all Rugger and Socker with him now," said Uncle Peter with a fond smile, "but in a month or two it will be nothing but batting and bowling and scores and averages. The worst of it is, he has infected me with his enthusiasm."

"You might have left school only yesterday," said Elizabeth, rallying the young man. "Did you learn nothing at Eton, only to play the game?"

"Very little else," said the boy truthfully. "I was there five years. I learnt to play the game and hate a cad. I don't think I learnt anything out of books."

"And well worth the money too, my lad," said Uncle Peter approvingly.

I should have thought Elizabeth the last girl in the world to be attracted by Beaumont Iredale's bigness and comeliness and boyish good-heartedness. Yet it seemed that in the most natural way possible Uncle Peter's wish was tending towards fulfilment. They seemed to like each other uncommonly well; and though Elizabeth rallied Beaumont all the time, there was a softness in her eyes and voice for him that was new in Elizabeth. Possibly she, the girl of brains, found her natural affinity

in this young giant of twenty-five, with whom intellect was not the strong point.

They amused themselves incessantly, Elizabeth and Beaumont and Uncle Peter. The young couple had not yet reached the stage at which their own company only was the one thing desirable. The three went all sorts of expeditions, to fairs, to Gaelic football matches, to every meet, in spite of the rain, and arrived home weary and splashed with mud, and hungry, but exceedingly jovial. To amuse herself suited Elizabeth. She had burnt the ledgers and the day-books; and Nuala now wore a black silk gown, and carried a bunch of keys, and made the new cook's life a misery. And Elizabeth looked sleek and brilliant and gay as the daffodils that grew in our old orchard—great shining single trumpets, the strongest flowers I have ever seen.

With me life went much the same. I gardened when the rain left off for a little. I still kept my fowls and gathered their eggs, and assisted at the hatching of downy little chickens and ducklings. I wished it to be so. My sisters' lots had changed within the year. Mine was much the same as of old. I was rejoiced to think that I might have as much labour in the garden this year as I would, that I might indulge in grafts and seedlings and all manner of new garden appurtenances to my heart's content. But without the old employments to solace me what should I do?

Another thing I was glad of was that I need not kill my chickens. I was fond of them even when they reached the long-legged, lanky stage; and it seemed horrible to make pets of them only to give them up to the knife. How many a time I had gone away shuddering as the hour of sacrifice approached, and miles out on the bog had held my fingers in my ears fancying I heard the shrieks and flutterings of the creatures in Nuala's hands, and dreading the thought of the knife.

Now I reared fewer broods, and thought that I would kill none of them, no matter what Nuala might say about such folly: for our improved estate and Nuala's had not made her a whit more in awe of us. I would give the cockerels to the poor neighbours. If they had to be killed it shouldn't lie at my door. And the pullets I would keep for laying. One could always dispose of any number of fresh eggs. Nuala had been right when she held me impractical.

But now it was my birthday, and everyone was kind, as though they had guessed that I felt myself to be of little importance to anyone beside my two sisters.

My plate was heaped up with flowers and sweets and little packages. I was first in the breakfast-room, where a bright fire and the pretty table made one forget the rain-washed landscape and the soaking country outside.

I turned over the little packages eagerly with I knew

not what fond and foolish hope: but of course there was nothing; there could be nothing. Why, how should he know my birthday, even if he had not probably forgotten my existence by this time?

There was a little watch from mother, with a French enamel picture at the back surrounded by diamonds. From Miss Trescott there was a pearl necklet. Mrs. Langrishe had sent me a fan. There was a lace fichu from Georgie O'Hara, a photograph of Rossetti's "Beata Beatrix" from Madge.

There was a tiny book unopened still. I knew by the handwriting that it was from Margaret Synnott. Well, Margaret had not much to give away. Her gifts were correspondingly to be prized.

I opened the little packet. There was a note from Margaret inside.

My dear Joan,—I want you to have this book because for years it has been precious to me. Now I am making my will, am cutting myself loose from the "things" that are only hindrances to such as me, though happier women may enjoy them still. Keep it for yourself. I should like to know that none but you handled it.

Your friend,

MARGARET.

It was a little edition of Keats, exquisitely bound in vellum, tooled with gold. I opened it at the fly-leaf,

and looked within. Then I understood why Margaret had wished me to keep it to myself. It had an inscription: "*Qu'elle est belle la Marguerite!* P.S., April", and a date many years earlier.

Something in the triumphant lover's happiness of the inscription smote me. What a contrast with the weariness of the woman who was stripping herself of even the memories of old love, as though she were dying to the world!

There was a running foot on the stairs and a snatch of song. I thrust the book in my pocket as Elizabeth came in.

She took my face between her hands and kissed it.

"A hundred happy returns, dear Joan," she said. "Why, you are early afoot on your birthday; I thought to have been here before you."

"Thank you, Betty," I said, returning the kiss. "And for the chocolates. They are what I like."

"I am glad you like them," she said. "I exhausted my pocket-money to provide them."

I did not know why she laughed, and I did not ask, displaying my gifts to her.

She admired them heartily. Then drawing my hand into hers, she said:

"I have to show you Uncle Peter's gift. Prepare yourself for something very jolly. You know Uncle Peter is a rich man."

"What has he given me?" I asked in wonder.

"My dear, he heard you long for a little den of your own where you could keep your books and things. He has gratified you."

There is a tiny quaint room in a *tourelle* which the eccentric builder of Ardeelish had placed at the corner of the west wing. It was filled with rubbish; and often, often, I had wished I could make it my own.

"It will be little enough to sweep and dust yourself," said Elizabeth, flinging open the door. "Ah, we have had all sorts of devices to keep you out of the way while this was done!"

The room, which was lit by a long window, had been papered in a dull blue-gray Morris paper. The window was hung with short frilled curtains of yellow-spotted muslin, drawn back to show the lovely view of mountain and brown bogland. There were long curtains of the gray-blue; and the carpet was the same soft harmonious colour. Each side of the fireplace, with its little blue-tiled hearth, there was a book-case, and in the midst of the longest stretch of wall there was the most beautiful thing of all, a tall old Sheraton desk with exquisite inlayings in its rich brown mahogany, and standing open, with the key in the lock, displaying innumerable drawers and pigeon-holes. There was nothing else in the room except a couple of low pretty chairs of wicker-work.

I looked around me with almost incredulous delight while Elizabeth watched my face.

"There," she said; "it was what you would have chosen of all things, isn't it? I may tell Uncle Peter so?"

But I couldn't speak: the pleasure was too great.

"Uncle Peter ought to have seen your face," said Elizabeth, "but he insisted that I should make his offering. It is his whim for me to confer his benefits as though I should receive upon my head all the kind and grateful thoughts that are his due. You like it, Joan dear?"

"It is lovely," I said at last.

"Well, come to breakfast. Here is the key of your domain. You can come back and look your fill and transfer your property here. Won't it be delightful to do? Uncle Peter wanted to furnish the room completely, even to the set of Japanese tea-things in which you will regale your friends to tea. But I said no, a thousand times no. I thought you ought to have just the shell of happiness to fill up with your own buyings and your friends' gifts from time to time. It is not as if you were a poor girl, Joan."

"You were right," I said. "It is more lovely just as it is."

And I turned back for another look.

"But he would give you the desk," said Elizabeth.

"He had seen it somewhere in Dublin and fancied it. And I told him you would write beautiful things at it, for you have the imagination, Joan, and my poor hard cleverness is dull beside yours."

Then we went down-stairs hand in hand.

But the delights were not over. After breakfast there was a gleam of sun, and I noticed Rose answer Elizabeth's summons, and take a whispered message and go out.

In a few seconds Elizabeth came and led me to the window, and there outside it stood the tiniest basket-phaeton, with a little rough pony in the shafts which surely I knew.

"Why, it is Mr. Thorneycroft's Colleen," I said.

"It is yours now," said Elizabeth. "The whole equipage is yours. It is a joint gift from Delia and myself and Kinvarra. Kinvarra has somehow arranged it with Mr. Thorneycroft. And if you go outside and examine it you will find a rug made of the skins of beasts which Mr. Thorneycroft shot himself. Kinvarra says it is a veritable trophy. And here is Mr. Iredale with a bouquet as large as a cart-wheel."

So after all it was not an unhappy birthday. What girl could be unhappy indeed with so many proofs of kindness and good-will?

Kinvarra and Mr. Thorneycroft were to have come to dinner that evening, but Kinvarra arrived alone, and

we were all sorry to learn that poor Mr. Thorneycroft had taken a chill, and very much against his will had been persuaded not to take the drive in the damp weather.

I made an opportunity to thank Kinvarra, who had found his way into all our affections, for his share in the beautiful gift of the morning.

"Come with me, Joan," he said, "and show me your pretty room. Delia has told me all about it."

So I lit a candle and we went up the twisted stairs to my dear new possession in the little tower.

Kinvarra held the candle above his head and looked about him.

"It is a pretty nest," he said. "You will be happy here, Joan, till you take flight to another."

"I hope Uncle Peter's wealth will pass us by sufficiently to leave us here," I said. "I should hate to go."

"You will stay, Joan, no doubt, if you wish it. He is the best of fairy god-fathers, for he wants everyone to choose his or her gift."

"Tell me," I said, "how did you persuade Mr. Thorneycroft to give you Colleen?"

Something in his kind merry eyes made me suddenly blush.

"Alec Thorneycroft thinks a deal about you, Joan," he said; "really a very great deal."

I looked away and said nothing.

"Colleen was always meant for you, Joan, only he didn't very well know how to offer it, poor fellow."

Still I said nothing.

"You couldn't think of him, Joan, my dear?" said Kinvarra wistfully.

"Not in the way you mean," I answered, finding my voice at last.

"He is the dearest and loyallest of fellows, Joan. I think if you knew him you must return his love."

I shook my head. I had no hope of it.

"Ah well," said Kinvarra, "he guessed as much, poor chap!"

Then there was nothing more said between us about it, and if Kinvarra guessed there was someone else he was too kind and too chivalrous to let me know that he guessed it.

But my birthday ended happily, for they had all proved their love for me.

CHAPTER XXVII.

GEORGIE.

IT was a few days later, when looking from my tower window, I saw Elizabeth, Uncle Peter, and Beaumont ride slowly up the avenue. It was a hunting day, and they were coming back much earlier than usual,

which was the first thing that struck me. The next was that they were riding as mournfully as though it was a funeral. I had often watched them return, and sometimes Beaumont and Elizabeth were running races against each other; sometimes Elizabeth rode between the two men who adored her, flinging jests and laughter, from one side to the other. They had never come home too tired and muddy for high spirits. Now, what could have happened?

I was outside the hall door before the riders had dismounted. It was a soft, damp afternoon, with clouds wreathing the side of the mountain and its point purple as a pansy, cutting the gray heaven above.

"What is the matter, Betty?" I cried from the doorstep.

"There has been an accident, Joan," she said, springing from her horse, and as she came up to me I saw that she was pale and her face was disfigured with tears.

"But you are all right?" I said, looking from one to the other.

"Yes, we are all right. Come in and I will tell you about it."

I followed her into the dining-room, and she closed the door.

"You'll be awfully grieved, Joan, for you are so fond of her. It is poor Georgie O'Hara."

"Georgie! she's not killed?"

"I don't know; the doctor couldn't say if she would live: she was alive when they lifted her up."

"What happened?"

"You know Terry's Corner where the *boreen* narrows so that it is little more than a rut between two stone walls. Well, the fox went that way. The master cleared *boreen* and all with one stride, without bringing down a stone; so did the huntsman. We were to the left, pounding away after the master. Georgie was a little to the right, riding magnificently as usual. Georgie scorns a lead since Tom Crosby went away, and there was no one quite near her. But the master saw it all; he tried to warn her, but it was too late. On the top of the second wall, exactly opposite where Georgie's mare rose for the leap, there was that tiny half-witted boy of Conroy's, chattering to himself, and playing at shop with broken crockery set out on a couple of flat stones. When Georgie saw him she gave a cry, and tried to pull the mare to one side. The mare crashed into the top of the wall, bringing it down, and then turned clean over with Georgie underneath."

Elizabeth stopped and sobbed hard.

"Did you see her, Betty?"

"They wouldn't let me come near. Dr. Blake was following luckily. They made a litter with a mattress fetched from the police-hut at Gortduff, and got her up on it. I couldn't see her, but I saw her poor father's face."

"He was out?"

"He was riding some distance behind Georgie; they had got the mare up by the time he came."

We stood there and stared at each other, crying and trembling. Everyone was fond of Georgie.

Presently mother came in to find us, having heard the bad news. She comforted us, bidding us remember Georgie's youth and strength; "and," said she, "if the poor child should not survive it she dies a martyr. Happy for us all if we could die so, instead of in our inglorious beds!"

It cast a great shadow over us all. Elizabeth would go to no more hunts, and I don't think I heard her laugh till the day came that brought us hope that Georgie might live. Georgie was my friend, but I loved Elizabeth for the feeling she showed while Georgie was in danger.

I remember, the day the good news came, that the rain had lifted a little, and there was a gleam of watery sun about three o'clock. I had just made up my mind to go out, and had consulted Grip on the subject to find that he thoroughly approved of the idea, when Rose knocked at my door.

"If you please, miss, you're wanted below-stairs," she said. "Mr. O'Hara himself's in the drawing-room, an' I think by the face of him, poor ould gentleman, that there's good news of Miss Georgie."

"God grant it, Rose!" said I, jumping up. "You're a good girl, Rose. I've a pretty sash I'd like to give you; it will make you very smart when you go to the pattern."

"Thank you, Miss Joan; but, sure, what am I good for? I wouldn't be sayin' no to the sash, but, sure, you wouldn't be rewardin' me for havin' a natural feelin' for the poor young lady that smashed herself to bits to save that little innocent, Timmie Conroy? Sure, they've put her in a street ballad. I hear they're singin' it as far away as Galway—likenin' her they are to Joan of Arc, an' Judith, an' Clayopatra, an' St. Brigid, I hear. Some people does be sayin' that it was a terrible waste to see a fine young lady like her destroyed for the sake of savin' Timmie; but, sure, them poor Conroys has a terrible feelin' for that same little soft boy. 'Tis a wonder, miss, how the Lord sends the more love the more it's needed!"

But by this time we were at the drawing-room door, and the philosophic Rose went on to the door leading to the kitchen part of the house.

When I went in Mr. O'Hara was standing in the middle of the floor with his hat in his hand, apparently too excited to sit down. Elizabeth, standing opposite to him, was plying him with questions; there was no one else in the room.

"I was just going to send for you," said Elizabeth.

"Rose brought me word," said I; "she guessed from Mr. O'Hara's face that there was good news."

The poor gentleman was piteously changed since I had seen him last. I noticed how his hair had gone whiter, and his ruddy tints had faded, and his cheerful expression given place to one sad and careworn.

"Rose was right, God be thanked!" he said. "She will live, my dear Miss Joan, she will live! The doctors can't promise us much more than that just yet, but after the—the sorrow and—and the anxiety we have undergone, that seems a great deal."

"Enough to rest on and be thankful," I said. "It is an immense relief."

"Her mother and I both felt your goodness—your constant enquiries—and—and all that. We know you are all fond of Georgie, and so, after Dr. Trevanion had been and said he could now safely leave Dr. Blake in charge, her mother said to me, 'I'll tell you what, my dear; tell them to bring round Crusader, and ride over with the good news to Lady Burke and her daughters'. And so I did. It is nearly three weeks since I put my leg across Crusader's back; I thought I'd never ride again."

Mother came in just then, and had to hear the good news about Georgie.

"She lies there," her father said, "all encased in plaster of Paris, with just her eyes alive."

He hastily applied a red handkerchief to his own, and then went on.

"She has spoken once or twice, just in a whisper. She asked after the mare."

"Was the poor brute badly hurt?" asked mother.

"Hardly at all, ma'am; it wasn't her fault, poor thing, though you'd think it was to hear the way she whinnies and frets for Georgie. We weren't angry with the mare at all; and I'll tell you what, Lady Burke, knowing how it happened, I'm proud of my girl, so I am."

"So you have a right to be," I cried. "Why, she's quite famous. Do you know they're singing her praises in Galway in a street ballad?"

"Well, no, I hadn't heard it," said Mr. O'Hara, looking as if he didn't know whether to be pleased or not.

"You think Georgie knew her danger?" asked mother; "when she did it, I mean."

"Is it Georgie? Georgie knew it was she or the child. She chose that it should be she; she didn't even take the chances, as a more ignorant rider might have done."

"We're all proud of her," said mother.

"The little lad's parents showed a very proper feeling about it. The poor things have been again and again to enquire; and the poor woman brought a pair of chickens and a few new-laid eggs for Georgie. She's not allowed anything of the sort yet, but I hadn't the heart to tell the poor thing so, though I really felt ashamed of taking them from her."

"She would have been dreadfully hurt if you had

refused them," said mother. "I wouldn't deny them the pleasure of giving."

"You're right, ma'am; it was the way I looked at it myself."

"I think we'll have Georgie about among us again," said mother softly; "and just her own strong, handsome self."

"God grant it!" said the father. "There was a time when I used to pray for her to be given back to us, and it didn't seem to me to matter how great an invalid, or how sadly maimed she was to be, so long as she was to stay with us. Now I know that her life is given back to us I want more: I want her health and strength; I want my bonny bright girl again."

"We shall hope and pray," said mother. "Do you know that the country people think her act of self-sacrifice must have been doubly acceptable in the sight of heaven because it was done for an afflicted child? As Nuala said to me, 'God loves best those He afflicts most'; and so this poor child must be very near His heart."

"They have really touching ideas, haven't they?" said Mr. O'Hara, much affected. "Well, there; I hope we'll always be able to accept the Lord's will, anyhow."

"I suppose it will be ages and ages before they will let Georgie see anyone?" said Elizabeth.

"Well, no, my dear. Once the bones begin to heal inside their casing, it will be safe enough. She has to

get her strength up, you know; but Trevanion thinks there is no danger of inflammation, and that there can be no internal injuries. But she was dreadfully broken up."

"She is quite conscious now?" I asked.

"Oh, quite! only very weak, of course. Why, her first speech was a jest. 'How do you feel, Georgie?' I asked, when the doctors were done casing her fractures, and I was allowed to see her at last. I didn't feel that I dared speak above a whisper even then. 'As well as anyone can feel in a strait waistcoat, dad,' she said, and her eyes laughed, though I think she was too weak to smile. As soon as ever she's able to see visitors I shall let you know. I think Miss Joan must be first, eh? Miss Joan was always Georgie's friend."

"Give her my dear love," I said, "and tell her I am longing to come."

"Tea, Lady Burke? No, thank you," said Mr O'Hara in response to a question of mother's. "I always think, if you will excuse my saying it, that ladies injure their digestions by drinking afternoon tea. I think I'll be getting off, thank you. My girl might chance to be asking for me."

"It was sad for poor Madge, too, that her wedding had to be postponed," said mother.

"She has behaved like a brick over it, and so has the master. They wanted to put it off till autumn, till

Georgie was well enough to attend it, but I don't think Georgie would like that. We've left it that Georgie's to fix the date as soon as we can consult her about it. Of course, it can't be quite so early as was intended, and it will have to be very quiet. But I think Georgie will not postpone it for long. She was never one to grudge other folk their happiness. It will be a poor send-off," he added apologetically, "and we had meant to give you young folk some merry-making, but all that must be postponed."

"Till Georgie can 'take the flure' with the best of us," said Elizabeth.

"Indeed I hope so, Miss Betty."

I went down-stairs with Mr. O'Hara, and stood on the door-step while he mounted. He was just going to ride away, when I ran down the steps and stood by his side.

"Has anyone written to Mr. Tom Crosby?" I asked, and my eyes looked away from him.

Mr. O'Hara stared between his horse's ears.

"I have written," he said. "It was almost the first thing Georgie asked me, if he had been written to. You see, she's a great correspondent of his, and she fears the poor fellow would miss her letters. Khansore, you see, Miss Joan, is rather out of the beaten track, even for India. I shouldn't be surprised now if poor Tom hadn't seen a white face hardly since he went out; and Georgie

is always thoughtful. It's surprising how thoughtful she always was, even when she was as wild as a little filly. And she and Tom were always friends."

"What did you say to him?" I asked.

"Well, to tell you the truth, Miss Joan, I didn't write to Tom till—about two hours ago. I couldn't bear to write while the end was in suspense. But now that we know Georgie will stay with us, I have written to tell him the good news and the bad news together. You see, it's lonely where Tom is."

"And he is fond of Georgie."

"Yes, I honestly believe he is fond of Georgie. He couldn't be fonder, I am sure, of a—a sister of his own. Tom is a thoroughly good fellow, Miss Joan, a thoroughly good fellow. It's a thousand pities he had to go away from all his friends to live among a set of barbarian blacks. A good sportsman like Tom, too; such a horseman, and no end of a good fellow in every way. Ah, well, Tom's not alone in that."

"The rajah seems to appreciate his good qualities."

"Ah! Georgie told you that! Poor Georgie! But hadn't you better go in, my dear? There's the first drop of rain, and that big cloud over Carrigduff holds a deluge, I'll be bound."

"You'll get wet on the way home. Won't you send Crusader round, and rest a bit?"

"No, my dear. That shower will last well into to-





morrow morning, I expect. Besides, what Irishman is the worse for a wetting?"

"It's dreadfully wet weather."

"It is. The rain is making quite a record."

He looked from Muckanish to Carrigduff, and a frown contracted his forehead.

"If the Lord doesn't send us a dry spell, the river will be in flood," he said.

"And what then?"

"Cattle and crops and people will be drowned. I remember the last time— But go in, my dear. The drops are coming faster. I couldn't forgive myself if you took cold."

I ran up the steps, and turned to wave my hand to him.

"My dear love to Georgie!" I cried. "And ride fast. You mustn't get wet."

But that seemed little likely as he rode off through the sheets of rain. The cloud above Carrigduff had broken with a vengeance.

CHAPTER XXVIII.

VICTORY.

MISS TRESCOTT had been away again, which was not remarkable in itself, for she was a woman of the world, and had many friends.

"Now," she said, "that I have really made up my mind that this is my home, I can neglect people no longer. It was different while I was only visiting in Ireland, and my visit might come to an end any day. Now that I have found my headquarters, I shall be going and coming."

It was delightful to welcome her back, and she came with her hands full of gifts. We hardly knew how to spend Uncle Peter's money, perhaps. We had always had so little money that we had not discovered many needs. But the woman who had been accustomed to luxurious surroundings all her days was different, and she had a keen eye for what would add to our comforts and joys. She brought me an autotype of Botticelli's "Spring", and a little silver reading-lamp for my room. The day after she had returned she came upstairs to inspect my hanging of the picture, and looked about her critically, with her long-handled lorgnette to her eyes.

I had been at work in her absence, and she nodded approval, especially of the verse on my door in stenciling of gold-leaf:

"A servant with this clause
Makes drudgery divine,
Who sweeps a room as for Thy laws,
Makes that and th' action fine".

"Ah!" she said; "if we could make our kitchen wenches feel that! It would revolutionize domestic service. Last

year, in Genoa, at a procession I saw an effigy of a little servant saint—Zita was it?—with her duster in her hand and a broom for a sceptre, a little, humble-looking creature, with a mob-cap against the dust, and a great apron, and her feet in pattens. It was a sweet thing. Do you suppose she sweeps the corridors of heaven, Joan?"

"Very likely," I answered, "and finds her heaven in being a good and faithful servant."

"How's Margaret?" she asked. "Is she still doing the housework?"

"I haven't seen Margaret for ages."

"How's that? Afraid of a wetting?"

"If we feared a wetting we should never go out. However, you noticed the Irish rain never hurts you. No, I haven't been, because I had a feeling that my visits embarrassed Margaret. We were hardly together five minutes before there would come that terrible tap-tap of the old woman's stick on the floor above, and Margaret would look frightened at once, and push me out of the house. I've been thinking that it is more of an unkindness than a kindness to visit Margaret in the present circumstances."

"I'll tell you what," said Miss Trescott. "I believe Margaret's mother is mad."

Her words came like an illumination, revealing suddenly all that had been dark and bewildering before.

"I believe you are right," said I. "I am sure now she has been mad all the time. It explains her opposition to Margaret's marriage and everything. Do you know, these lonely, beautiful places are full of mad people? though no one ever thinks of sending them to an asylum unless they become homicidal."

"It is the loneliness, I suppose. Nature will not make up to us for the loss of our own kind. Yes, I have a conviction that we have stumbled on the truth. The old woman is quite mad, Joan. I want you to see Margaret for me now."

"Why?"

"I have been wondering if I was a blundering old fool. But now I am comforted, Joan. I have been plotting all these months back. Who do you suppose escorted me here from London?"

I looked at her "with a wild surmise".

"Margaret's old lover, Patrick Stewart."

"No?" I said incredulously.

"Yes, Patrick Stewart, twenty years younger in anticipation of hearing from Margaret's own lips that she has loved him all the time."

"Where is he?"

"I haven't got him in my pocket, child. He's at Mrs. Molony's at the post-office in the village. She has made him very comfortable."

"And you want me to tell Margaret?"

"I want you to tell Margaret. She is afraid of me for some odd reason."

"She is afraid of him, and of her own age, and of the difference the years have made. She daren't look Patrick Stewart in the face lest his eyes should tell her that he expected the girl and finds the faded and sorrowful woman."

"He would change all that; happiness would. Why I know women ten years Margaret's seniors who are beautiful and young with their babies and their husbands. My friend Kate Cantillon is one of them. Her youth is a perpetual surprise to me."

"Margaret has been frightened out of all confidence."

"She would soon be frightened out of her wits. I wonder she hasn't been long ago."

"What shall we do if she will not see him?"

"She must be made to see him. He knows all. He is prepared to be patient."

"What is he like?"

"I shall ask your mother to invite him to dinner. You will like him. He is older looking than he ought to be. Does Margaret think that the years have passed only with her? But he is younger in a way since the disappointment and the cynicism have passed from his face."

"What am I to say to Margaret?"

"Tell her that he has come, that he is determined she

shall see him. Tell her she owes it to him. Ah, Joan child, why should you need to be told what to say by an old maid like me?"

"I hate the phrase," said I, "and you know you wouldn't use it of anyone but yourself."

"Perhaps not," she said; "but because the mere words have an ignoble association. The condition is not ignoble: we keep—our ideals."

"I shall see Margaret this afternoon," I said. "I will do my best."

"It will be all right. I was afraid to meddle till Kate Cantillon's strange meeting with him persuaded me that it was the will of heaven. It is not a case, Joan, in which we persuade ourselves of that will because it coincides with our own."

"How could it be? You are unselfishly striving for another person's happiness. But if she listens to Patrick Stewart, what is to become of her mother?"

"That is a question for future consideration. Let it be, Joan. Do not trouble about too many things at once."

The afternoon was gray and misting slightly when I set out for my walk across the bog. I anticipated a struggle with Margaret, and as I went I was considering what I should say to her to move her from her deadly resolution. I went along quickly, hardly noticing anything about me, because my thoughts were so much absorbed.

Near his own house Paddy Rafferty met me. He was drawing a load of peat in his little ass-cart, and I remarked to him absent-mindedly that the rain showed no sign of leaving off.

"It'll lave off," he said, "when it's drowned the people. The river's like a cup that's brimmed to the top, and the mountains is sendin' thousands of little strames leakin' into that same full cup. Where is it goin' to end, Miss Joan? Anyway sure it's a great comfort to be livin' in a bog, though we do get no chance of dryin' the turf at all. But the way wid the bog is, the more rain you pour into it the more it'll hould. Yet there's some people do be sayin' they wouldn't like to live in a bog."

After a little delay the door was opened to me by Margaret herself as usual.

"Step quietly, Joan," she said in a low voice. "My mother's asleep. She has seemed rather drowsy lately. I suppose it's the weather."

As she spoke I could hear the sound of snoring coming down through the narrow well of staircase, a depressing, strangling kind of snore that made the house if possible more melancholy.

"I am glad she is asleep," I said. "For I want a good long talk. Give me some tea, Margaret."

"With pleasure, Joan. Tea is my great comfort nowadays. I make a cup for myself whenever I can leave my mother."

"I dare say. You make nothing else for yourself either. You are living on tea. You look like it."

"There isn't much time when an invalid's wants have to be attended to," said Margaret apologetically.

"I have brought a basket," I said, "with mother's love. I don't care, Margaret, you'll have to take it. There is a bottle of old port for your mother, a cold chicken, a pot of cream, some butter and eggs."

"To think of you carrying it all this way, Joan!"

"I wish I could have carried more."

"I won't refuse the gifts, Joan. They will be for my mother, if she will take them. She has a strange pride about such things."

"You are going to have some of them now. A bit of the chicken and a boiled egg. Yes, you are; you look half-starved. I beg your pardon, Margaret, but you really do."

I noticed how her shoulders were beginning to curve in over her chest. She would be going into consumption or something presently. It was time that Patrick Stewart should come.

I let her finish her meal quietly, forcing her to eat, though her appetite seemed poor. All the time I was quaking lest the old woman should awake; but the heavy snoring went on, filling the house it seemed to me.

"Your mother should see a doctor," I said.

"She won't, Joan," said Margaret, looking at me with alarm.

"Does she always snore like that?"

"I have only noticed it for the last few days."

"Send for Dr. Blake."

"I will send, Joan, if you think I ought to. But she will be bitterly angry."

"You have always feared her anger too much, Margaret."

"Perhaps, Joan."

"What is the anger of any human creature after all? Anger feels its own limitations so keenly that it is a wonder it should ever frighten us."

"It is different if you have always stood in awe of any person's displeasure from the time you were a little child. It is hard to shake it off."

"Margaret," I said, "you want someone to look after you. What would happen if your mother should become seriously ill and you here utterly alone?"

I did not shrink from alarming Margaret about her mother, as I should have done in the case of another daughter. I felt that Margaret's love, if ever it had existed, must have long ago become a matter of awe and custom and duty. And it was true that the snoring alarmed me.

"Whom should I have, Joan?"

"Why not have the lover your mother parted you

from long ago? The lover who has never ceased to love you, and only waits your recall."

"What do you mean, Joan? I have heard nothing of Mr. Stewart for many years."

"He waits your recall, Margaret."

"If you are not mad, Joan, what does he want with me? a woman nearly middle-aged in years, old in feeling."

"Nonsense; he wants the woman he loves."

"What do you know of his feelings, Joan? To talk of him is like calling up a ghost."

"He is a substantial spirit, Margaret. He is here in our own neighbourhood, lodging at the post-office in Kilcora; is that actual enough for you?"

Margaret looked about her with an expression half of fear, half of exaltation.

"Do men love like that, Joan?" she said. "Do they keep the memory of a woman, who has ill-used them, for a dozen years? Do they wait on her will to recall them?"

"This one does. He knows now that the letter dismissing him was not really yours."

"Ah," said Margaret, "I dare not face my mother's anger! It would kill her. It would kill me."

"Do you owe him nothing at all, no reparation for the suffering you have caused? Is he to go down to the grave lonely and bitter because he had the misfortune to

love a woman who was too great a coward to fight for her love?"

"*I am* a coward, Joan," said Margaret, putting out her hands as though to push me off. "But if it were to do over again, and I were young, I should not be a coward. More than my mother's anger I fear the look in his eyes that would tell me how sadly I am changed. It would kill me, Joan."

"Give him his chance. See him. You owe him as much as that."

She covered her face with her hands.

"See him, Margaret," I urged. "You will see in his eyes that he loves you." I pulled her hands down from her face. "Why, you silly Margaret," I said, "he has as much to fear as you. Do you know that you, not the years, have made him gray-haired before his time? Let him plead for himself. Do not sin against your love for him a second time, and condemn him again to a solitude and a bitterness which this time will be irreparable."

I had not hoped for it, but suddenly Margaret whispered:

"I will see him, Joan. If his happiness depends on me, I shall make him happy. He will be patient and let me nurse my mother while she remains."

"Has he not already served seven years?" I answered, delighted with my victory.

"Give me time, let me get used to it before I see him."

"When will you see him?"

"Will you come to-morrow, Joan, and I shall tell you? I must tell my mother. Perhaps she will not be very angry after all. I have been a good daughter to her, Joan."

"The best in the world," I said, answering the wistful prayer for encouragement in her eyes. "Why, indeed, should she not bless you?"

"Now go, Joan," said Margaret, standing up. "I want to think. It is so strange that it bewilders me."

"Margaret, bride," I said, kissing her.

"Ah, it is too much yet," she said; "I cannot think of it."

As I left the gloomy house behind me the rain blew in my face, and the new-risen moon was heavy with rain.

CHAPTER XXIX.

THE FLOODS.

AS I took the road across the bog the next afternoon the rain had left off and the western sky had broken up splendidly. At first there was only the lifting of a heavy cloud and a broad belt of fire; then that opened wider and wider, and the whole wet height of heaven caught the reflection; then a wind came and scattered and broke the gray masses of cloud into flying

silver; it seemed as though a million-leaved rose in heaven had scattered her leaves and that the vault of the sky was heaped full.

It was phenomenally beautiful, and I paused by the door of Paddy Rafferty's cabin to share the emotion it caused in me with some human creature, though it were only Mrs. Paddy crossing the threads at her primitive loom and now and again lifting her eyes to the wonderful sky.

There was a little diversion caused by Grip's chasing Mrs. Rafferty's Tibby, a fine white cat who apparently consoled Mrs. Rafferty for her childless state, for, she said, "Tibby had the wit of a child, and was well-mannered besides, whereas you know yourself, Miss Joan, that childher is often terrible bould."

"Grand, isn't it, Mrs. Rafferty?" I said.

"The wondherful works of God, that's what I do be sayin' over to meself, Miss Joan."

"What do you make of it—in regard to the weather?"

"Well, I wouldn't be sayin' that it doesn't look like a clearance. There's Herself beyant there, rowlin' out o' the purty sky. There's less trouble about her than I've seen on a moon these two months back."

The crescent moon had indeed swung out of the cold east, a crescent of clear silver.

"A red sky at night
Is the shepherd's delight",

I quoted.

"Aye, so they do be sayin', Miss Joan," agreed Mrs. Rafferty, unwinding a crossed thread. "Paddy was sayin' you do be goin' down to see Miss Margaret Synnott below. She'd better be out of it, she an' th' ould lady. Paddy says the Dan'll be up to mischief; an' Paddy's known that river, man an' boy, for a matter of sixty year."

"The Dan's very full, I believe, fuller than it has been for years, but it sinks rapidly, it has such a good outlet, and if the weather takes up now the danger of a flood will be past."

"Paddy remembers it in flood. It done terrible damage up above Crobane, an' the channel of it got that choked with trees an' haystacks an' cattle an' sheep it had drowned that it took a matter of a week before the floods went down. The place where that ould house below stands now was covered for two days, Paddy does be sayin'; an' the roarin' o' the water was somethin' unnatural."

"Ah, well, I hope there's no danger this time. It would be hard to get old Mrs. Synnott out of the house."

"The weary's on her, buryin' poor Miss Margaret in that terrible ould dead-an'-alive place. Miss Margaret's terrible shy, Miss Joan, but always a kind word for the poor."

"Well, I'd better be getting on, Mrs. Rafferty, for I want a bit of daylight to help me home. That young moon doesn't give much light nor stay long."

"But March has a long daylight. You'll be home in the finest of time. I'd be sayin' a word to Miss Margaret about the river."

"So I shall, Mrs. Rafferty, but I dare say they're pretty safe. I'm sure we're going to have fine weather."

I was not afraid of the river. I had always known it quiet between its banks or shrunken thin if the summer happened to be dry. It lay in a valley between two hills, beyond the narrow range to my left, at the foot of which the bog began. At the mouth of it it made two channels for itself before it emptied into the sea.

It was not till I had skirted the flank of the hill and left the bog for the sea-road that I came in sight of the river. The road descended slightly to the little foot-bridge by which one reached the spit of land on which the Synnotts' house was built. As I turned the flank of the mountain I became conscious that where the river had been only a dark line there was now a broad band of silver, and further away there was a second silver band. I knew what it was at once, the Dan had overflowed its banks.

The wooden footbridge had served the need of many generations, and was covered all over with dates and initials cut in the rails and posts. Where it crosses, the banks of the river slope so that you are usually a quarter of the way across before you are over the water. Now the banks were brimmed, and as I stepped on to the

bridge I was obliged to leap across a thin welter of water that was some distance up the path.

The water was coming down at a great rate, swirling into eddies and currents, and making a shouting noise as it came. When I stepped on to the stout little bridge it was trembling and shaking with the impact of the water, and the posts below that supported it were already swathed in debris of hay and broken branches, the first promise of what the river would bring down.

Standing there with the bridge trembling below me I looked up into the valley of the river. There I saw a wide stretch of water covering the little fields at the foot of the mountains, reflecting now the roses of the sky and the little crescent moon of afternoon in a reflection broken and turbulent; and as I stood so the sound of the waters came to me, a sound like a mutter of wind, threatening and full of hurry and confusion.

I hardly doubted that the river would go down without climbing the sand-hill on which the house was built. Still, it might not. It might be as well if Margaret could persuade that old mother of hers, who hadn't left the house for years, to walk the little way that would put them on solid land where help would easily reach them.

I was only a minute watching the flood, but when I turned toward the house twilight seemed to have come suddenly, and the house stood up against the faded roses

of the sky black and menacing. There was not a curtain in all the dreary front, nothing but one blank window after another, the higher ones yet holding a blood-red gleam from the sky above the mountain. Well, if the house were once empty of human life the floods might take it. It was a mad thing to build it, a mad thing to live in it.

As I came off the bridge I got wet feet. The water extended too far for me to leap it, and I was obliged to ford it as best I could. I was so sure that Margaret would be watching for me that I almost expected to see the door open before I reached it. I had carried Grip across the bridge. I could not trust him not to leap into the water, and now as I put him down he ran before me and scratched vigorously at the hall-door as though a shelter were welcome.

But no one opened it. I knocked several times, each time louder than the preceding, but no one came. Several times I looked behind me and fancied the river was a little higher, but I could not be sure, nor could I see if on the other side it had overflowed its banks. I had always understood that the Dan had a deep channel, and not so far away were its twin outlets to the sea. Of course the danger was if the river should be dammed by an accumulation of debris at the bridges. And, meanwhile, every minute made it more difficult for people on the island to leave it dry-shod.

At last, as my repeated knockings brought no answer—I had wasted a quarter of an hour in knocking, and had looked to be on my homeward road by this—I went round the house to reconnoitre. There was no garden, no enclosure of any kind; not a shrub, not a flower; only a treeless waste of coarse bents and sandy grasses. Most of the lower windows had bars to them, to add to the prison-like aspect of the house; but I found one that was without, and by good fortune it was not hasped. I pushed up the window and climbed in.

It was the little room off the hall, of which Margaret had made a kitchen, and now it was dark and fireless, with a smell as if a paraffin lamp or stove had been left to gutter out.

With Grip at my heels I went into the hall. The house was now full of grayness and shadows. I opened one or two doors and looked into the rooms. They smelt mouldily, as though uninhabited. I went on to the second floor, calling Margaret as I went. I paused outside the door, which I guessed from its situation to be the one inhabited by Margaret's mother; it was over the little room by which I had entered, and I remembered how the stick used to tap when I had been a little while with Margaret.

The house seemed like a house of the dead, but as I stood outside the door and called, Margaret came out with a candle in her hand, and with the face of a sleep-walker

—a sleep-walker, I should say, who has dreamed terribly, for she looked at once dazed and scared to death.

“Your mother is not dead?” I whispered, as she closed the door behind her.

“Not dead, Joan, but something terrible has happened to her. I did not dare to leave her to summon help; besides, I knew you would come some time. How did you get in?”

“By the window; I had knocked many times.”

“Ah, I did not hear you! She is—terrible, Joan. Since last night I have endured terrible things.”

I forgot all about the flood.

“I have wine here,” I said; “I brought it for you. Come where you can sit down and tell me what has happened. You look more dead than alive.”

I opened the door of a room and looked in. I saw it was a bedroom, wretchedly furnished. My eye rested on a broken chair, then on the ragged canopy of a great four-poster bed. The room had the indescribable stuffiness of an unopened room in which the smell of peat lingers.

“Not there,” I said, hastily closing the door; “let us go down-stairs.”

Margaret led the way obediently. When we had got into the little room I knew, I poured Margaret some wine in a cup. She drank it, and something of the terror-stricken look went out of her face.

“I have eaten nothing since yesterday,” she said.

“What has happened, Margaret?”

“Oh, Joan, I don’t know yet! I ought to have sent for Dr. Blake yesterday. Now, can you send someone for him when you go back? I told her last night that *he* was come again. She was furiously angry; she said the most terrible, the most pitiless things, Joan; she was like a madwoman, except that she sat there saying wild things in a composed and rigid way. Afterwards she would take nothing from my hands. She would not let me touch her nor help her to bed. We sat there with the lamp between us, and her face looking away from me. Sometime in the night I—I fell asleep, or fainted, or something. I had had no food. I awoke with a start, a nameless terror, feeling that something had happened in the room, something had fallen, or there was a cry, or something. There lay my mother, all huddled up in the chair, and fallen to one side. She has been like that ever since. One side of her face is distorted. I think she has had a stroke, Joan, a paralytic stroke; she tries to speak, but she can say nothing. All the time she looks so angry, so terrible angry!”

“She has had a stroke, Margaret; but, do not be vexed with me—have you never thought of it? I believe the trouble, the loss of her money in the Land League days, the poverty, the loneliness, affected her mind.”

To my amazement Margaret’s face suddenly lost all its tense and rigid lines. Her eyes softened; her whole

expression became one of the most maternal pity and tenderness.

"Why, Joan," she said, "that has been it always! Poor mother, I wish I had thought of it before. She had so much trouble—and I remember a time when she was—kinder."

The suggestion, which I had been afraid to make if the excitement of the moment had not forced it from me, had unravelled a knot in Margaret's life. Dimly I saw it as she saw it. She was no longer, then, the daughter of an unnatural mother; no longer trembling beneath anger that was like a curse. With this new light on matters, I think Margaret forgave everything; was ready—God be praised for such possibilities in human nature!—with love and pity to replace the hard duty and the fear of years.

"I have fed her," she said, "against her will. She has had a beaten-up egg, and some of the wine. I think she would have resisted if she could, but she is helpless now."

Again there was the maternal gleam in Margaret's sad face.

"But you should be fetching me help, Joan," she said; "and instead I keep you here talking. Will you send a messenger to Dr. Blake, and say I want him to-night?"

"You will be alone here."

"I shall not be afraid now. I was afraid, Joan, for it seemed so awful that she should—hate me."

"I shall come back; I will bring help, and comfort, and light, and fire. To-morrow she must have a nurse."

I had forgotten utterly about the flood.

Suddenly Margaret sprang to her feet.

"What is that, Joan? Is it the wind rising?"

There was a low moaning noise outside, and the house suddenly shook as though a battering-ram had been driven against it.

"It is the river, Margaret. It is too late for me to go for Dr. Blake."

Under the door came a thin swirl of gray water.

"It is coming into the house," said Margaret quietly; "let us go upstairs, Joan."

We got wet feet in passing through the hall; the water was driving below the door.

We paused on the first landing and looked out. The water was all round the house. As far as we could see to the base of the mountain there was nothing but water; nothing appeared above it; there were no trees to break the expanse. One might as well be in the midst of the sea.

I looked in the direction of the footbridge; it was too dark to see anything.

"To think it should have followed me so fast!" I said. "Why, I crossed by the bridge!"

"You will not cross by it to-morrow, nor the next day," said Margaret quietly. "I am sorry you are here,

Joan. It is not fair that you should be caught into our danger."

"I am glad I am here," I said, "because when I do not return home they will send to look for me, and we shall be taken out before the flood rises higher; else you might have been here for days!"

"The Lord is here," said Margaret, with her pale smile; "as much here as on dry land."

"And the way to heaven as easy by water as by land," I cried, catching the glow of her exaltation that banished fear.

"This is His ark," said Margaret, turning from the window.

The tall, flimsily-built house trembled like a living creature as the flood broke about it.

CHAPTER XXX.

THE VIGIL.

WE must fetch food and firing and light and water before the flood rises," said Margaret, as we turned from looking on the waste of waters. "We have to provision ourselves till help comes."

I looked at her in amazement. All the frozen and unreasonable terror was gone from her face. In this moment

of extreme danger she looked softer, happier, more of warm human life than I had ever known her.

We took off our shoes and stockings before we reached the stream that was flowing in the hall as naturally as though it were a brook on the hillside.

"It is rising," said Margaret; "the cellars must be full."

We waded through the water to the little room where Margaret stored everything. Two or three journeys we made of it before we had all we wanted: coal, candles, water, and food.

"We shall not die in the dark," said Margaret, with her quiet smile.

"You are not afraid?" I said as I stooped to pick up Grip, who had sat shivering on the lowest dry step while we made our excursions.

"I am not afraid," said Margaret, "though I should be glad if you were safe, Joan."

"We shall all be safe together or perish together," I answered.

But I did not think that we should perish. Surely the house would endure for a time the stress and strain of the flood that rolled by it, and I knew that as soon as daylight broke help would be forthcoming. Unfortunately there was no moon these nights, the tender crescent so soon waned; but daybreak came fairly early, and Margaret had infected me with her faith. I was not afraid.

I was more afraid of the lonely house, I think, than of

the waste of waters. It was as though the house bore still about it some evil of man's doing or making, while the waters were the creatures of God and obedient to His will.

"We must keep together," Margaret whispered, at the door of her mother's room. "Do not be frightened at her, Joan. Think of her as someone heavily afflicted."

She opened the door and we went in. The room was ill-ventilated and oppressive. At first there was only the darkness, but Margaret, who had blown out her candle, lit the lamp with a steady hand. Then the naked, bare, cheerless room revealed itself. The window was a yawning stretch of black sky. The two beds the room contained were covered with poor patchwork quilts. There was a table with the remnants of food upon it, a few comfortless cane-bottomed chairs, a handful of fire in the grate. Not a picture, not a book, nothing but the bare floor, the damp walls, miserably papered, and the poor furniture.

I got an impression of all this before I came to the figure half in shadow by the fire. The lamplight fell upon the face sideways and gave it a curiously malignant expression. Huddled up as it was in an ignominious deformity, it might have been the figure of a very old woman, yet Margaret's mother could not be very old. Sixty at the outside; and how many women are comely at that!

But the thing that held me fascinated was the curious light of madness in the eyes. The body might be dead, but the eyes yet lived and burned. Why, if she had had eyes like that all these years, the merest unprofessional person might have known her to be mad.

Her hands lay in her lap, knotted bundles of bones and sinews. One moved restlessly, the other lay with that indescribable huddled look which no words of mine can describe. I feared her more than the flood. Now I felt that Margaret's light of sanity must have burned more clearly than most people's, or the companionship of *this* might well have blown it out.

The eyes looked at me, and I felt I could not move under their scrutiny. Then the spell was broken, for Margaret, going to the old woman's side, said in a clear, patient voice, as if she were not sure how many senses were awake—"It is Joan Burke, mother. The river is in flood, and she can't leave the house till help comes."

It was impossible to say if the old woman knew, but the eyes turned on Margaret and kept there tenaciously while Margaret moved about the room replenishing the fire and setting food for a meal.

I went to the window and looked out. The flood was a better companion than those eyes. The night promised to be inky-black, but still there was a low, red light in the sky, enough by which to see the steadily-flowing sea of water in the valley moving down resistlessly upon us.

Fortunately there was no wind. Now and again there was a low moan over the water, but the night was calm. If the flood had been lashed by a storm we were in worse case.

I ate a little and drank some tea when the food was ready, then I went down-stairs to see how the water was. It had risen a foot.

Margaret sat facing her mother reading the *Imitation of Christ*.

"Could you read, Joan?" she asked me.

"No, I cannot read," I said. I was full of wonder at Margaret's calm. The terrors of years had vanished utterly. Was this brave, strong, quiet woman Margaret Synnott?

Now and again she rose and did something for the comfort of the helpless figure. Then she went back to her book, and if I caught her eye she smiled, and once or twice she stooped to caress Grip, who was wandering about in a restless way, whining and trembling.

It might have been about nine o'clock when a sudden glare filled the room. I ran to the window and looked out.

"They have lit a bonfire over there on the high ground, Margaret," I cried. "It is to give us courage, to let us know that help is at hand."

I flung up the window and looked out. A cool air from the water blew in my face, reviving me after the

stifling room. "Hello!" came blown to me over the water. I shouted back as hard as I could, and Margaret came behind me and held the lamp above my head for a signal. Someone took a lighted stick from the fire and waved it in answer.

"They will rescue us when there is light," I said. "I pray they may not attempt it before morning with all those eddies and currents."

"Joy cometh in the morning!" said Margaret smiling.

And all the time our house shook like a house of cards.

The water climbed higher and higher in the house. Sometimes it seemed to me that the house was subsiding, sinking into its own cellars. How long would it stand shivering before it fell in a heap like the old dead figure over there with the living eyes? I saw now how far below the level of the valley the house lay. Why, the water might fill it almost to its upper floors. And what if the Lake of the Stag up there on Slieve Roe had overflowed, as once it was said to have done? If this went on the house would be soon uprooted and helpless as a dead leaf on the waste of waters. And there sat Margaret, with her curious ethereal smile, reading her *Imitation*. Once I went to her side restlessly, and she held the page to me with its chapter-heading. It was *Of Four Things that Bring Much Inward Peace*. Smiling, she turned the page, and held it to me to read: *Command the winds and tempests;*

say unto the sea, Be still; say to the north wind, Blow not, and there shall be a great calm.

The hours went on, and I was sure now they meditated no attempt at rescue before daylight. Sometimes I nodded asleep—to my own amazement—waking up to find that only a few minutes had gone by. Each time I awoke I went to the window and saw the bonfire still burning.

Once I wondered if the old figure by the fire yet retained the intelligence to notice and wonder at the change in Margaret. Was this the cowering woman of yesterday, the creature, girl and woman, ground long under a senseless and pitiless domination? Ah well, I thought I understood. Margaret had come into a wealth of knowledge since yesterday. She had learned how a man can love; and she thought she had learned that the real mother, the soul hidden somewhere behind that pitiless mask, did not hate her child.

I had ceased from going to measure the water before the dawn broke. To find it ever rising, rising, was the way fear lay. When it came—well, when it came, we should see it stealing below the door, a little curling gray snake, as we had seen it down-stairs. I had turned my back to the room before the first shiver of dawn made all the east cold, and sat with my hands in my lap waiting for the day with its hope or for the end that might come before the day. The house trembled ever more and more. Grip was lying on my frock, whimpering.

"Margaret!" I cried at last; "thank God, there is the dawn!"

We stood watching while it crept slowly into the room. After a time Margaret went and extinguished the lamp. Then she came to my side with a deep breath of relief.

"She is asleep at last, thank God," she said. "I thought she would never sleep."

Then we watched the dawn broaden and brighten.

"It will be a fine day," I said, watching the long, pale gold streaks in the sky.

Things grew into greater and greater distinctness. The fire on the high ground went down as our lamp had been extinguished. Presently we began to make out figures and things over there. Then we saw a crowd of men and realized that they were launching a boat.

"They have brought one of the fishermen's boats round the point," I said. "It will take us all, and the boats at Portroe are strong sea-going boats."

"I have thought sometimes that the daybreak would be too late, Joan," said Margaret.

The house was straining at its foundations like a hound at its leash.

I looked into Margaret's face. Now by the daybreak she looked exhausted almost to the point of dying. The strain and exaltation of the night had been too much for her. I put her into a chair and held some wine

to her lips. She rested there looking more dead than alive.

I had no eyes for the figure in the chair. Looking over the window-sill I saw that the water was but a few feet below it. Then I looked further, and I thought of nothing else but the boat that was coming.

There were five men in the boat. They were putting off at a point much higher up than we were, because the current must drift them down our way. Four were at the oars, one was steering. When they were ready they cast off, and almost immediately were swept out in the stream. They partly drifted with the current, but watching closely I could see they were making for mid-stream in a slanting direction. There was no crossing the stream, but they could guide the direction of the boat so that presently they would be in a line with the house.

I watched them breathlessly. Would they do it, or would they be swept with the current out to sea? Slowly but surely I saw that they were making headway. At last they were nearly opposite the window. I could make out their faces. Mr. Thorneycroft was steering; Kinvarra, Beaumont Iredale, a stranger, and a blue-jerseyed fisherman from the Point were rowing. Someone called out a breathless encouragement to me across the water. They came nearer, nearer; then Beaumont Iredale stood up, and, as the boat would have swept past, caught at the sill with the boat-hook.

The boat swept round, and stood almost level with the window, tossing up and down on the water.

"Out of the way, Joan!" called out Kinvarra, flinging a coil of rope into the room. I stood back, and Kinvarra followed the rope. Then the stranger drew himself in across the window-sill. He was a slight man and lean, with a bronzed face, handsome, but over-lined for what I judged to be his years. He looked eagerly about the room. I heard a sudden cry from Margaret, and saw him go to her.

"Well, Maggie." That was all he said after the years of parting, and in the strange circumstances in which they met.

I had an odd thought of how a novelist would have made him say something much more elaborate.

Then he stooped and kissed her, and she answered his kiss. He stood by her then, with an arm about her shoulder, looking towards Kinvarra, who was arranging the rope.

"You are safe now, my dearest!" I heard him say reassuringly.

"And my mother; she is asleep. I thought how terrible it would be if, after all those years of sorrow, she were to die like this."

"She is safe too," he answered, as tenderly as if he were soothing a child.

The rope now was made fast.



M 630

"HE STOOD BY HER THEN, WITH AN ARM ABOUT HER SHOULDER"



"Come, my dearest," said the man, whom I knew to be Patrick Stewart.

"My mother!" said Margaret, drawing back.

"She will follow you. Come!"

Beaumont still held the boat steady with the boat-hook, to keep her from swaying or turning about. I saw Margaret lifted into the bows. Then Kinvarra handed Mr. Thorneycroft an armful of pillows from the bed. I saw him and Patrick Stewart next approach the old woman. An instant they stood, and looked at her strangely. Then Kinvarra lifted her hand, and dropped it again in a startled way.

"What are we to do?" I heard him whisper.

"Better take her; she is but a feather-weight."

Kinvarra seized a blanket from the bed, and wrapped the figure in it. Then they lifted it with the utmost reverence, and Mr. Thorneycroft received it, and laid the head in Margaret's lap. It was my turn next. The men were rowing amidships, and I sat in the stern with my face towards them and towards Margaret. I had my little Grip in my arms tight. The morning was getting bright as the two men clambered back again into the boat, and Kinvarra cut her adrift.

Even then I had leisure to notice Margaret's benignant gaze on the quiet head in her lap. It was like the face of a mother over her child; it was with a mother's gesture that she drew the blanket about the face.

She could not see, as I could, the stern, set faces of the rowers as the boat swirled round into the stream again.

"Let her go with the current!" shouted Kinvarra.

I watched them guiding the boat as well as they might with the oars, but there was no use doing much. The stream swept us on swiftly to the sea.

Mr. Thorneycroft answered the question in my eyes.

"Don't be afraid," he said, with his kind face full of concern. "We shall probably be swept out to sea. It is the best thing could happen to us. The boat is quite reliable."

Other things were voyaging down-stream with us, dangerous neighbours; sometimes a tree torn up by the roots, sometimes a great branch or a haycock, sometimes a dead sheep, and many indistinguishable shapes. I knew by the eyes of the rowers when something more dangerous than usual was coming, and watched them holding it off with the oars till we had parted company.

The morning was quite bright presently, and the rushing of the waters sensibly abated as we came nearer and nearer to the sea. The boat no longer sped like a mad creature, and I saw the rowers stoop to their oars. Then at last the sea was all about us, and the boat had taken a wide sweep to the left.

Beyond the commotion caused by the flood, the sea was like a mill-pond. When we had reached calm water the rowers rested for an instant, while the boat rocked up and down softly on the water.

"You are well out of it, Joan," said Kinvarra. "When the river goes down there will not be much trace of that old house there."

"It was splendidly done," said I.

"Work, boys!" said Kinvarra; "these ladies are exhausted. Let us get them to a house as soon as possible. Don't talk, Joan; you don't look fit for it."

We were now going along by the shore, under the shelter of the mountains and the woods upon their flank.

"I am making for the little bay below Kinvarra Castle," said Kinvarra, smiling at me again. "You must take what hospitality the place can afford you."

In a few minutes more we were in, and I was being half carried, half helped through the gardens I remembered.

Then we were in the house, and Kinvarra's house-keeper was bustling about us hospitably; but by this time I had only a hazy view of what was happening. I saw Kinvarra lay Margaret's mother upon a couch. Then someone was holding brandy to my lips. I thought I saw Margaret's lover draw her away from the couch on which her mother rested. "Everything will be done

for her," I heard him say, "but you, my dearest, must have food and rest." I heard a cry. Then it all faded off like a dream.

CHAPTER XXXI.

JOY COMETH IN THE MORNING.

WHEN I came back to the things of the world I was in my little bed at home. I might have dreamt the whole happening, except that Dr. Blake sat beside me with a finger on my wrist. Mother was standing by him smiling at me as my eyes began to recognize things.

"Ah, that is right!" the doctor said; "she will take no harm now. I am glad we are not going to have two sick people on our hands."

"Margaret?" I asked.

"Miss Synnott is in rather a low state," said the doctor. "She has not your strength, Miss Joan; and she has had much to endure."

"She will—get well?"

"Yes, yes, she will get well. But we must go easy for a time. She has been frightfully run down. And then to endure such terrible shocks after all."

"Ah," I cried, as things came back to me, "her mother is dead!"

"She is dead," said the doctor. "And from what I know of the case, I think it was the happiest thing could befall. But her daughter is inconsolable."

"Give her time," said mother. "It was a great shock, but presently—there will be consolatory circumstances."

"Ah," said the doctor, who was the kindest of gossips, "is it true, then, that Mr. Stewart is an old lover?"

"It is quite true."

"How very interesting! And he came back just in time to assist in her rescue."

"He came back just in time."

"Well, they say truth is stranger than fiction. But I'll tell you what, my dear madam. You are the young lady's nearest friend now, I suppose—and I shall say the same to Mr. Stewart—as soon as ever she begins to pick up a bit, he had better marry her and take her away."

"I agree with you that it will be wisest. And now about Joan?"

Dr. Blake patted my hand reassuringly.

"Miss Joan is all right. A few days' rest, and plenty of cheerful society, and she will forget her alarming experience. A little trip away, now, would be the best thing in the world for her."

"We must see if we can manage it," said mother, with her kind smile. "Are we to keep her in bed?"

"If she likes to rest there for the day. To-morrow

the sofa down-stairs. But there is really nothing the matter with Miss Joan, except of course the strain on her nerves and the consequent exhaustion."

"I want to hear everything that has happened," I said.

"So you shall, so you shall. Don't tire yourself too much for to-day, that is all."

So after the doctor had gone, and I had been fed, Betty came up to tell me everything, how they had been alarmed at my not coming back in time, and had been on the point of setting out to look for me when Paddy Rafferty had come with the news of the flood. And how Kinvarra, taking Beaumont, Iredale with him, had driven off furiously to Portroe to get one of the fishermen's boats, which had to be carted a great part of the way. Then Mr. Thorneycroft had gone off with Paddy and a great coil of rope, in case the boat should be too late; and Miss Trescott bethinking herself that Patrick Stewart had as much interest in the rescue as any man, had sent him word by Jim, and he had followed. Uncle Peter had ridden for Dr. Blake in case his services should be needed, and mother had had the big barouche out and filled with blankets, and had herself driven round to the scene of the rescue.

Then Betty told me how the others had arrived with the boat just in time to prevent Mr. Thorneycroft drowning himself, for he had twice attempted to

swim across with a rope to our window, fearing the house would not hold, and had twice been swept down by the current and rescued by the others with some difficulty. But nevertheless he was preparing to go a third time when the boat arrived.

"But why, why should he do it?" I asked. "If anyone was to have gone it ought to have been Mr. Stewart."

"Why, indeed?" echoed Betty. "There was no one there of special importance to him, was there, Joan? I suppose, then, it must have been his kindness of heart. But," she went on, "you mustn't imagine Mr. Stewart didn't behave splendidly; everyone says he did. But you see he's a Scotchman, and looks all around the thing before he does it, whereas an Englishman is so impulsive. I am sure they are twice as impulsive as we are, Joan, though it is a convention that things are otherwise. Mr. Stewart told us all about Mr. Thorneycroft's attempts; how else should we know? He thinks him a perfect lion for courage, but hasn't the least respect for his judgment. 'For,' he says, 'if he could have got across that stream with a rope, he could never have fetched back anyone alive.' Which Mr. Thorneycroft acknowledges now to be true, and seems very much ashamed of himself."

"Heroic little soul!" said I.

"Ah!" said Betty, "such people don't get their deserts

in this world, do they, Joan? I expect he was rather off his head, for Kinvarra could hardly keep him from making the third attempt while they were waiting for daylight to get the boat launched. Beaumont says that Kinvarra threatened to tie up Alec Thorneycroft with the rope rather than let him go, and Kinvarra was in earnest. But the hero, as you call him, is as much ashamed of himself as if he had been caught stealing somebody's pocket-handkerchief. No wonder; for Beaumont says Kinvarra called him all the duffers and soft-heads and idiots he could put his tongue to—and more."

"I shall not rest till I have thanked him."

"Don't, Joan; he forgets that he risked his life twice, and was kept by main force from doing it a third time, and thinks he only made a fool of himself and embarrassed those who were setting about the rescue sensibly. You should see Mr. Stewart's dry Scotch smile when he said to mother: 'That's a brave lad, but as for myself I thought I'd be more use to Margaret alive than dead'."

"To think I didn't know," said I. "And I was sitting close to him in the boat and saw how wet he was, but I thought he had been swamped by a sea, and never even said how sorry I was."

"He went near to giving us more to be sorry for," said Elizabeth, looking serious.

"But Margaret," I said; "tell me about Margaret."

"Ah, poor Margaret!" said Elizabeth. "Mr. Stewart indeed came miraculously in time. What we should do for Margaret if her lover had not come back I do not know. She does nothing now but cry—and for such a mother!"

"Margaret is conscious then?"

"She came to herself after a few hours. It shows how steady her mind is that it did not give way under the shock of the sudden discovery. She had no idea till she uncovered the face there in the library at Kinvarra Castle that she had been nursing her dead for some hours."

"It was fortunate she only discovered it then."

"It was, Joan, in more ways than one. No one knows but ourselves that the old woman was dead when she was taken on board. The people about must believe that she died after reaching land. Else disaster would follow Lanty Rearden and his boat, because they had carried the dead."

"We must keep the secret," I said, assenting.

"We shall keep it. Kinvarra, who understands and sympathizes with the people wonderfully, especially seeing that he was so long out of the country—but there, blood is thicker than water, and Kinvarra is the head of a clan—Kinvarra says Lanty is a fine fellow, and would be ill-requited by the discovery of the truth. So he

gives him fifty pounds. Lanty will be able to trawl against the French fishermen this year, and the old woman who only escaped drowning to die has been quietly laid at rest in Clonbroney with her husband."

"How did you get us home? I seem to remember nothing of it."

"Well, mother, seeing that the boat must be swept out to sea—I really think mother is the most wonderful of all—simply took the lower road, keeping the boat in sight as long as she could. Then seeing the probability of Kinvarra landing at his own landing-place, she drove there and arrived soon after you had been brought into the house. Uncle Peter, who had been scouring the country for a doctor, had had word of the road she had taken, and followed with Dr. Blake. Mother was very anxious to get you home. The doctor was all in favour of getting Margaret away too, and besides she couldn't stay there alone, so you two were just carried home in the barouche and put to bed. Kinvarra managed everything about poor old Mrs. Synnott. She was laid to rest this morning."

"This morning? What day is it?"

"It is Wednesday afternoon. You have drowsed away a day and a half nearly. I wish Margaret had slept so long."

"She knows?"

"Mr. Stewart told her that all was over. He is so

good, that man! He sits by her feeding her with spoonfuls of Nuala's chicken jelly, and letting her weep her fill."

"I think Margaret has wept the most bitter tears of her life," I said.

"I have seen her. She looks different since her lover has come back. Her grief is natural. Margaret in the old days used to strike me as something rather unnatural."

"If you had seen her last night you would have thought her something supernatural," I said.

"Ah! you will tell us sometime. Now it is better not to talk about that experience."

"But I feel all right, Betty."

"You are all right. Dr. Blake says that nature did a wonderful thing for you in giving you that long sleep. He says you are a fine healthy girl, that you would probably not have awakened then only that you were hungry."

"I am hungry again now."

"Your tea is coming up—a substantial tea. Do you know, Joan, I don't think you have taken a bit of harm? Uncle Peter says Harrogate. That will be for you to say."

"When, Betty?"

"When, Joan? Joan, forgive me; but I have a kind of idea that you may not want to go to Harrogate."

"What do you mean?"

Elizabeth's manner stirred in my breast that wild hope to the disappointment of which I had not grown so used that it did not stir again at times.

"Joan, we had a letter yesterday morning from General Benyon, asking if we had room for him and his nephew. It was written from a Dublin hotel, and asked for a wire in reply. Mother handed the letter to me. 'Of course, we are not receiving visitors in that way now,' she said. 'And it is no time for ordinary guests. Tell them we shall like to see them later as friends, but explain to them why we cannot say "Come" just now.'"

She paused and looked at me. My heart went down like lead. A voice within me cried bitterly that he had been sent back to Irene. He would never come again.

I suppose my eyes told my woe and my despair. My mind was in a tempest that it should have happened then when I was so helpless. I forgot to be ashamed, nor cared that Elizabeth was watching me curiously.

"Then you have destroyed my last chance of happiness," I said wildly, and burst out crying.

"Poor Joan!" said Elizabeth, in a voice so understanding that I hardly knew it. Elizabeth had been the one who had never felt a wound. "I shouldn't have tantalized you. I didn't send that answer, Joan. I wired instead, 'We shall be ready to take you in to-morrow'. They

come to-night late. They will sleep under this roof to-night. To-morrow you will see them."

"Dear, dear Betty!"

"Three months ago I should have blundered, Joan, with the best intentions in the world. Now I know better. Because good things come to me so naturally and sweetly, I am greedy for all the world to be happy."

Suddenly I caught the flash of diamonds from a ring on her finger.

"Betty!" I cried, seizing it and holding it to the light.

"Yes; it is that, Joan. I have known my joy was ready to fall into my lap almost since—Beaumont came. I was content to postpone it till—till his dear life was to be put in peril. Then I sent him away with the truth. I thought he might be going to die perhaps, and might never know, and I had to tell him. So it was sudden."

"You bade him go, Betty?"

"I bade him go; though I doubt if I was a coward but he would have gone without my bidding. Yet I bade him go. It was the hardest thing in the world to do, except—perhaps, to ask him to stay. That was the one thing impossible."

She stooped and kissed me suddenly.

"Now you know how it is, Joan, that I have grown wise. But here is your tea. Enjoy it. I had better go, for you know there are guests to come to-night."

"But mother—does mother know?"

"It is all right with mother. In little things, and she thinks this a little thing, she is always ready to yield her will. Is it a little thing, Joan?"

"I do not know, dear Bet. I cannot say yet, but I am so glad, so glad of your happiness."

"Everyone is glad, but I am too fortunate. Now eat and sleep, my dear. Is it not enough that to-night this roof shelters all you love?"

"It is enough, Betty. But—how much you have been learning!"

Elizabeth laughed softly.

"My Beaumont is a stupid boy, as brains go, but he, or—Love, has taught me many things."

It was only afterwards that I remembered how I had not asked if the flood had done much damage.

CHAPTER XXXII.

THE SPRING IS COME.

"The Lord of Love—ah, benedicite!

How mighty and how great a Lord is he!"

BUT when the morning came I dreaded to go downstairs, would have done anything in fact rather than go half-way to meet my happiness. I had had an unrest-

ful night, and awoke in the morning with an unrestful heart, trembling and fluttering like a bird caught in the hand, and more afraid of joy than it had ever been of pain.

My room was flooded with bright sun, and I remembered it was the first of April. I got up and pulled up the blind. The sky was blue and bright, and the country, where it was not blue water or purple mountain or brown bog, was green as—similes failed me, and I had to think of the “grass-green silk” of the ballad-makers.

“A happy April to you,” laughed Elizabeth, as she came in on her way down-stairs.

“I shall send up your breakfast-tray,” she said, “and afterwards you will come down-stairs to be made much of.”

“I had rather go to my tower-room till the afternoon,” I said. “Frankly, I don’t feel equal to going down-stairs just yet.”

“Very well then, you shall stay till the afternoon. I think I know how you feel. There is a glare, a coldness in the morning—is that it, Joan?”

I shook my head. I did not know why, now my happiness was at hand, that I should feel reluctant to meet it.

“I shall send Rose to light your fire then, and you shall keep your tower, like St. Barbara, but only for this morning. Your books will be enough company.”

"They never fail, Betty, though you will not believe it."

"Ah, they would fail me, because reality is so much sweeter or so much sadder. I think it is when one is not living keenly that books suffice."

"Now you are talking about novels," I said a trifle contemptuously; "but there are books for every mood."

"I am unlettered," laughed Elizabeth; "I only read novels. What are you going to wear, Joan? Your lilac delaine?"

"Because it is the 1st of April, and the lambs are playing out there, and the birds singing, I shall put on my pretty lilac delaine. I can change for the afternoon."

"Look pretty, Joan, because you have escaped peril and been given delicious life. We needn't skimp and save our frocks now, you know."

So I put on the lilac delaine with its pattern of pansies and leaves on a pale ground, and after breakfast I went down to my little tower-room, where a newly-made fire was burning merrily, while the window was wide open, and the room was sweet with the primroses and wallflowers Elizabeth was putting in a bowl.

"I've heaps to do," she said, clearing away the litter of stalks and leaves. "But why haven't you asked me, Joan, about them? Don't you want to know, or would you rather find out for yourself? The poor old general,

the squire, as his nephew calls him, is a good deal changed. He has been very ill this winter. I think perhaps that explains the delay,—about their coming back, I mean.”

“Ah, I am sorry!” I said.

“But he will grow strong again now. He had influenza in the autumn, and it left him very ill with a complication of things. They wintered abroad.”

“I am very glad he will grow strong again. He is a dear old man, though he is short-tempered.”

Elizabeth went away and left me. But though I had defended my books I did not feel I wanted them to-day. Instead, I drew my chair to the window, and leaning on the sill with my chin on my hands I fell to thinking how good God was to have saved me for this hour, and how sad it would have been if I had drowned in the old house with my joy actually on its way. For that Dick—he was always Dick in my thoughts—came to tell me he was free I never doubted.

Then the door opened suddenly, and he was standing on the threshold smiling, with his eyes full of eagerness.

“He would come,” said Elizabeth, who came in with him, “though I told him he wasn’t wanted. And he was so clever that he got mother on his side. He button-holed her all last evening, and she has sent him to you, Joan.”

But I have always suspected that Elizabeth meant

him to come, because she had urged me to put on the delaine, and had made the room pretty with flowers and firelight.

Then she went out and left us together.

"It ought to have been in the garden, Joan," said my lover, "but this pretty room will serve."

And then he kissed me, our kiss of betrothal.

"I thought you would never come," I said afterwards.

"Six months, Joan. Was it so long to you? It was an eternity to me."

"And to me," I said.

"Ah, to you too!" he cried, enraptured.

"But you could stay away," I said, liking to reproach him that he might defend himself.

"You know the dear old squire went to death's door, Joan."

"Elizabeth told me half an hour ago."

"And you were sorry?"

"I was very sorry, though he wanted you to marry Irene."

"Ah, that is all over! You will forgive him, Joan. He is the dearest old fellow. I know now that if Irene had not seen fit to dismiss me, I might have trusted him even then. I was mistaken about him, Joan. I thought Irene was first in his heart. Now I know that she was second. She is no longer that. The place waits for you."

"How did it happen?"

"I will tell you, my dearest. After I left you last September the first thing I did was to go to Irene and make a clean breast of it."

"Well?"

"Well, what I had expected happened. I became valuable to Irene as soon as she found I was slipping through her fingers. She would not release me."

"Poor Irene!"

I could afford to be sorry for Irene now. Dick took up my hand and kissed it.

"You are wrong, my sweetheart," he said; "I am only precious to you. You think your goose a swan. You shall hear about Irene."

"What did she say?"

"She absolutely wept one or two pearly tears. I had never thought Irene could weep. She said she could not consent to the breaking of an engagement about which everyone knew; that it would make quite a little scandal; people would say she had been slighted. 'No, Irene,' I said, 'no one will say that, for our little world knows that you have kept me dangling all these years. It will only believe that you have finally decided to let me drop.' I don't like telling you these things, Joan, but you have a right to know, and you are my other half. Besides, I want you to know all lest you should ever have a misgiving that I had treated another girl ill for your sake. I am a soft-hearted fellow. I believe if any

woman had ever honoured me by loving me that I must have loved her in return."

"Ah," said I, "that is why you—care for me!"

"You hard-hearted little person! I knew you were the one girl the first minute I laid eyes upon you; whereas you only took pity on me because—because the squire described me as such a clumsy dog, and perhaps because you guessed at my state."

"I am glad you feel it was pity," I said. "But about Irene; I suppose she pitied you too."

Dick laughed.

"I left Irene still wearing her fetters. I think she was very angry because I told her there was someone else. But I did not mean to go on with it, Joan. How could I, when I loved another girl with all my heart? And then the squire fell ill. That was a black time, Joan, when the dear old chap hovered between life and death. By Jove, I don't like to think of it. And afterwards, it wasn't a case of the doctor coming to you one day and saying, 'I am happy to tell you the patient is now out of danger'. I used to think how lucky people were to whom that happened. No, it was a matter of suspense for months, for he would creep a little way towards recovery, and then he would slide back again; and I never knew any morning I awoke whether he would be a shade better or a shade worse. It was awful, Joan."

He looked at me with a scared remembrance of those days, and all the merriment which was usually in his eyes had vanished.

"Poor Dick!" I said softly.

"By Jove, it was poor Dick! And I longed more than ever I did in my life to tell you about it, but I couldn't as long as things weren't straight with Irene; and I couldn't do anything while he was so ill, especially as the doctors were afraid of his heart. Upon my word, my sweetheart, I don't know what you'll say to me, but I'm afraid there were times when I forgot everything but him, watching him slipping and sliding on the road back to life."

"I should have despised you if you hadn't," said I.

Dick smiled at me.

"Irene would have always expected to be first," he said. "However, I took him abroad to the sun and the warm air as soon as ever he could go; and for weeks he seemed to make no progress that he didn't lose as fast as he made it. When he really began to be better one hardly dared to believe it. At last one morning in February, when we were sitting on the verandah of our hotel at Monte Carlo, he said to me suddenly, 'Dick, my boy, when are you going to bring home a mistress to Hawk's Nest? I've had a narrow squeak of never seeing your wife.' I was so unprepared for it that I just blurted out miserably that I couldn't go on with the affair with

Irene. I don't know what I expected to follow, but I just sat humped up with my chin in my hands waiting. After a second or two I took courage to look at him, and his expression wasn't an angry and excited one, as I had feared, but quite benignant. 'How long have you felt like that, my lad?' he asked. 'Since last autumn when we were in Ireland.' 'Ah!' he said; and I wondered how much he knew, or guessed at. Then he asked me if I had told Irene; and encouraged by his gentleness I just let him know everything. He would believe that Irene was fond of me despite that she had kept me dangling after her all those years. But, to my amazement, he took the point of view that it is more honourable to break an engagement when one's heart is not in it than to go on with it. Of course it's the commonest of common-sense; but so many good people believe otherwise. 'I'm afraid I've been much to blame,' he said magnanimously, 'for I let you see, my boy, that I dearly desired the marriage. But that was because I believed you desired it too, and I knew that Irene, like her mother before her, was a girl in a thousand. But I never set Irene before your happiness, my dear; never believe that I could do that,' he said, 'though I do very much love and admire Irene.' Then we consulted together as to how I might most honourably set myself free, if Irene wished to keep me; but Uncle Bob would not believe that she would hold me against my will. However, all difficulties were solved by

a letter from Irene, acquainting me that she had accepted an offer of marriage from Lord Whyteleafe. He is as old as Uncle Bob, and not at all as nice a person."

"How did he take it?"

"He was rather shocked. He wouldn't say anything; he is too loyal for that. But I don't think he has mentioned Irene since. Now, do you know, he is longing to see you?"

I felt myself blush hotly. The mere thought of all the congratulations awaiting me dismayed me beyond measure, and the prospect of meeting General Benyon in the drawing-room among the others was most dismaying of all.

Dick watched my face anxiously, and I think he read my thoughts, for he said suddenly:

"I'll tell you what. Let us have him up here and get it over."

"Won't the climb be too much for him?"

"Not a bit of it. Once he began to mend he mended like anything; he'll be himself before the summer's out."

"Then bring him," I said.

It was with hot cheeks I heard them mounting the stairs a few minutes later, but I met them at the door, nevertheless, and General Benyon, taking my hands and kissing them, said in the dearest way:

"And so you are going to make my boy very happy, Miss Joan?"

"And you, sir," said his nephew, "are going to make her feel what a stupid, ungallant fellow he is beside his uncle."

"Be off with you!" roared General Benyon with pretended anger, "and let me make the lady's better acquaintance. Don't come back for at least ten minutes."

So Dick went off laughing, and the dear old man put me into a chair and drew his own near mine, and began telling me what a good fellow Dick was, and how tender-hearted; and how he had nursed him in sickness better than a woman could, and so on, as if I didn't know it all.

"Now don't keep him waiting," he added very earnestly. "His house and mine are awaiting a mistress; and I can tell you I'm very impatient. I'm ready to give up everything to you and Dick, if you'll give the old soldier a seat in the chimney-corner for the rest of his days."

"I shall do whatever he and you wish," I said, seeing that he looked to me for an answer.

"That's right, my dear. There's a deal to be done, but it will be done in time. I know the house is in order, for we have an excellent housekeeper; but of course Dick will want to furnish and decorate your own rooms for you according to your taste and his. But there are some things you must tell me: how you would like your little brougham lined, for instance, and about the re-setting of some of the jewels that are rather old-fashioned."

"Ah," said I, and there were tears in my eyes, "I don't want any jewels, only Dick and you."

Then you should have seen how the dear old man beamed upon me.

"There is one thing," he said hastily, "that I must get over before Dick returns, and that is, to say, my dear, that I fear I may have said to you that my lad was an idle dog, and should have gone to sea like his father."

"Did you say it to me? I knew you thought it, because Dick told me; and all the time, sir—I think I ought to tell you—he longed for the sea, and only gave up his career to be with you."

The general looked at me in a thunder-stricken way.

"Well, then, I'm a stupid, ungrateful old blockhead," he said, "and am only fit to be shot for standing in the way of a fine fellow like Dick, who would have been a credit, I am sure, even to the country that produced Nelson and Collingwood."

"Dick is satisfied," I said, "because he loves you."

"And to think I did the lad such an injustice!" he cried, with so crest-fallen and contrite an air that I almost repented telling him.

Then he turned to me with a different expression.

"My dear," he said, "I've known my nephew Dick from his cradle, as a father might, better than most fathers do their children, and though I was mistaken on

that one point, I'll tell you something I'm not mistaken in, and that is, that you're going to marry as fine a lad as ever breathed."

With that he became confidential, leaning forward and putting a hand on my arm.

"There is only one incident in the lad's career," he said, "to which I look back with grief. Did I ever tell you how at the age of five Dick broke an orchid, a most valuable orchid?"

"I think you did," I said.

"Well, then, you will understand, my dear, why it is that though I shall give up everything to you and Dick, I shall keep the control of the gardens in my own hands. Why, Rashleigh—my soldier-servant, my dear—would, I believe, be almost capable of shooting down Dick, though he loves him like the apple of his eye, if he saw him approaching the orchid-houses."

CHAPTER XXXIII.

"NOT DEATH, BUT LOVE."

WHAT, all my pretty chickens!" said mother, when she took me to her heart; and that was the only indication I had ever had that mother knew her Shakespeare.

Then she set me at a distance, and there were tears in her eyes, though she smiled.

"But we shall not all go together, nor just yet," I said confusedly.

"I shall keep my baby the longest after all, though it looked at one time as if she must go first. I think if the young men were content to wait, the old would not be. I am sure your Uncle Peter will outlive many of us; yet he talks as though his life hung on a thread, and that he might never see Elizabeth take the head of his table unless she consented to do it at once."

"But what are you going to do?" said I. "And how shall we ever bear to be a day away from you?"

"Ah, child, it is a law of nature that you will fulfil, and it is also a law of God."

"You will be with one or another of us always."

Mother drew herself up her full little height, and said proudly:

"I shall visit my dear daughters from time to time, of course; but I don't believe in living in any house but my own. It is wiser," she added as an after-thought, "for married people not to have always a third face at the board."

"You will not live alone!" I cried aghast.

"Miss Trescott has offered to live with me. In fact, she says she won't live anywhere else, so you would have had to take her in as well as me. She loves this

country, and says it has all she desires in the way of sport, and that we must provide our society. We shall stay on here. Your Uncle Peter approves. So, when you or Elizabeth are home-sick, you can come home. I shall keep everything as you remember it. It is a great comfort to me that Delia will not be far away."

"And Derrymore?"

"It is Elizabeth's by right, when the lease falls in. Your Uncle Peter says he will restore it to its ancient splendour and dignity. His heiress can afford an Irish country-seat."

"We are too prosperous; it is positively vulgar. Why couldn't one of us have married a really poor man?"

Mother laughed.

"You will be merely comfortable, Joan."

"Yes; I am glad I am not to have a lot of money like Elizabeth, nor a title like Delia."

"But you will have a little margin to do good with," said mother, with her wistful eyes upon me.

"I shall not forget the lessons I learned at your knee. Do you remember when the shipwrecked sailors had all the blankets?"

"I remember, child. I had forgotten."

"And Nuala went fluttering all over the house like a hen robbed of her chickens."

"There will never have been such a time for marrying and giving in marriage," said mother. "I suppose Mar-

garet will marry Mr. Stewart quietly as soon as she is able, and will go off to the Riviera to get strong."

"I am glad Margaret is escaped from the dungeon that was her life. One could not have been happy in the sunlight thinking of her there. I know now what Miss Trescott meant."

"God has delivered her," said mother seriously; "but even in the dungeon there was room for Him."

"You think she will consent to marry Mr. Stewart immediately?"

"I think she will rest in the will of her friends for her, and in the will of the one who is going to be her best friend."

"There will be her wedding-clothes," I said thoughtfully.

Mother's face became animated. She is too true a woman not to be interested in clothes.

"We have been talking about it already, Helen Trescott and I. We are going to give her her wedding outfit as our joint wedding-present."

"Ah, she cannot refuse it given that way! I should like to have my part in it. Uncle Peter is so generous—I think I could run to her wedding-dress."

"So you shall, dear Joan, if you wish it. I shall be immersed in wedding-clothes. What a treat it will be!"

"You will hate it presently."

"No, I sha'n't, Joan. How little you know your own

mother! I should have liked to make all my girls' wedding-things myself."

"Meanwhile, since you can't, there are the Sisters at the convent."

"Yes, they do deliciously. The little, fine tucks, and the lawn and lace and insertion."

"Why, mother, I didn't know you liked fine clothes so much."

"I have had to do without them nearly all my life, so there was no use talking; was there, dear?"

"You always looked lovely, even when you wore the plainest stuff gown, but now you shall go in silk attire, now that you have daughters."

Mother shook her head.

"There will be no occasion for it, we live so retired a life. If my duties brought me in contact with the world I should dress as finely as I thought fitting."

I laughed. I saw undreamt-of pleasures in store for me.

The next morning after breakfast I visited Margaret—Margaret, lying very pale and quiet in bed, but with a look of absolute content.

"Well, how are you, dear?"

"Resting, Joan; resting in God's goodness, and all the kindness and love He has sent me. I feel as if I hardly ever wanted to get up again."

'Poor Mr. Stewart!'

"That is only a way of expressing my well-being. Of course, his love is best of all—and the thought that my mother was not really—unkind. I have not the energy for more."

"You are going to eat and drink all manner of nourishing things. You know you are to be a bride soon. Your husband will nurse you back to health and strength."

"A week ago I did not know I had a lover still."

"A week hence you must tell me about your wedding-gown. It is to be my gift to you. Mr. Stewart wants to take you away as soon as possible to the south."

"The wedding-gown—for a sorrowful woman like me—must be something very modest."

"That would be to wrong your bridegroom. You must have something warm and soft to travel in, something of velvet and fur, and woollen, but you shall not be cheated of your wedding-dress. I have it in my mind—a thick, yellowish-white poplin, rich and dull. You will not do discredit to me."

"Dear Joan, I must accept your gift. I shall not have the wherewithal to buy a wedding-gown for myself. Perhaps I shall give you yours one day."

"Perhaps, Margaret."

"Why do you smile, Joan? Is it because you are so happy that we were saved?"

"Do you think, Margaret, that other people's lovers never come back?"

"Joan, Joan, are you happy too?"

"My lover cannot forgive yours because he did not return in time for the rescue."

"But he has come back."

"I believe lovers always do come back, Margaret, else why should ours appear in this simultaneous manner?"

But at that moment I thought on Georgie O'Hara, whose lover might never return, or who would return perhaps to find her crippled for life; and the thought cast a shadow on my joy.

Some weeks had passed before I received a note from Madge O'Hara asking me to come to see Georgie, and offering me the family congratulations.

Elizabeth and I were to be married on the 21st of June. It was now the 21st of May, and it was three weeks since Margaret had become Mrs. Stewart and had set out travelling by easy journeys for the south of Europe.

I had been rather disappointed that Georgie had not sent for me sooner. I had written her a timid little note as soon as Dick had come back, telling her of my joy; timid because it seemed to me that I ought not to be so blest while Georgie seemed to have been bereft of everything—except the love of her own people—that makes life and youth sweet. She had sent me word by Madge that she was glad, but knowing Georgie's big

heart, I had half hoped, half feared a summons from her and her congratulations.

I drove over alone in my pony-phaeton, rejecting any companionship except Grip's, and really feeling wretchedly ashamed of myself because I was going to be so undeservedly happy.

Mrs. O'Hara received me in the drawing-room, kissing me warmly on both cheeks. I noticed at once a new expression on her pleasant, matronly face, an expression perturbed, anxious, and yet pleased.

"I can see she goes on well," I said.

"Ah! you can see that, my dear. Yes, she goes on wonderfully well. She has such spirit. It amazes us all. Dr. Blake says it is half the battle to have such pluck as she has shown. She is so glad about you, my dear. So are we all. But it is unfair to us; it is really unfair. And Galway men will take it as a slight."

I laughed, putting my hand over her mouth. "If I could only see Georgie her old self and happy, I should be the happiest girl on earth."

"We shall trust—in the Infinite Mercy that has brought her safe so far. Of course we can't know till the bones have quite set. Now you will go up to her, my dear. She is expecting you."

I followed Mrs. O'Hara up the stairs, wondering at her air of subdued excitement.

In Georgie's room the windows were wide open, and the

air was the air of May, full of new songs and scents, deliciously fresh and exhilarating. Georgie was in bed, oddly rigid, but the eyes vivacious as ever in a face the brown tints of which were a little withered.

"Kiss me, Joan," she said. "I can't be demonstrative to you."

I kissed her silently. I did not want her to wish me joy. We had been in trouble together, and it seemed an intolerable contrast now.

"Sit down where I may see you, Joan," she said.

I sat facing the light, and felt her eyes wander over my face.

"So you have been given all you want, Joan."

I nodded. I could not trust myself to speak.

"And you are to be married on June the 21st, the sweetest day of the sweet o' the year. It is a happy choice. Are you very happy, Joan?"

"If you were only happy too, Georgie!"

"Ah, they have told you nothing! I forbade the mater to, but I could not be sure she would keep it. She was so full of it."

"What, Georgie?"

"Who knows by what strange ways our happiness comes home to us. Tom Crosby is on the seas, Joan."

"No, Georgie!"

"Yes, Joan. And swearing he will marry me in my plaster-of-Paris jacket. Think of it, Joan. The man

who left me coldly when I was pretty and gay, my misfortune brings him back."

"He ought never have gone."

"Ah, my dear!"—Georgie's eyes danced. "He has set my illness, my possible maiming for life, in the scales against my thousand a year, and the scale has gone down. Tom's Galway pride will not suffer."

"And you, Georgie?"

"I set Tom in the scales against my health and my good looks, and all the joys of active life, and Tom makes the scale go down."

"I know, Georgie."

"Of course you know. You would do the same, Joan; wouldn't you?"

"Yes, Georgie."

"My Tom! He is fifteen years older than I. He used to carry me about when he was a lanky boy and I a tiny child. He has no good looks at all, and not much brains, but he is—Tom."

"When did you hear he was coming?"

"Yesterday. You know dad wrote to tell him about my fall. He will not be long now. He had only to finish up things and follow the letter. I have had my first love-letter, Joan. It is here under my pillow, and for the life of me I couldn't reach to get it out. But it is there all the same. Joan, Joan, if the mare had not flung me that letter had never come!"

"The people said the Lord would reward you because you sacrificed yourself for that poor little idiot child."

"They were right, if they said that. He has given me my heart's desire. I used to think that if ever I was married I should like a pink wedding. A wedding in plaster-of-Paris is not the same kind of thing, Joan, but I fancy Tom will insist upon it. He breathes forth fire and fury against the miles that keep him from my side. I used to think he had patience to last out both our lives."

"You will get well, Georgie; surely you will get well. God will not forget you."

"I don't believe Tom minds if I were to lie like this all my life."

"The parents, Georgie; are they pleased?"

"They don't know whether to laugh or cry. You see, if I get well, we shall be quite at their door, Tom and I; and Madge and the master near neighbours."

"Will you postpone the marriage till you are better?"

"Not I. Mr. Ormsby will make us man and wife—I in the strangest garb that bride ever wore. Tom will not be gainsaid. I know Tom. And when he says that I am the only girl on earth for him, crippled or not crippled, I know he speaks the truth. But I'll tell you what, Joan. It is uncommonly hard on the Rajah of Khansore, who had at last found a Master of Horse to

his mind, and who is horribly unsettled by the whole affair."

"Oh, bother the rajah!"

"That is your insular intolerance," said Georgie, with those live eyes of hers dancing. "I believe he's a jolly nice old gentleman, and I shouldn't be at all surprised if he sent me a splendid barbaric wedding-present."

"That makes six weddings," said I. "If it occurred in a novel, instead of in real life, people would say that it was rather stretching the probabilities."

THE END.



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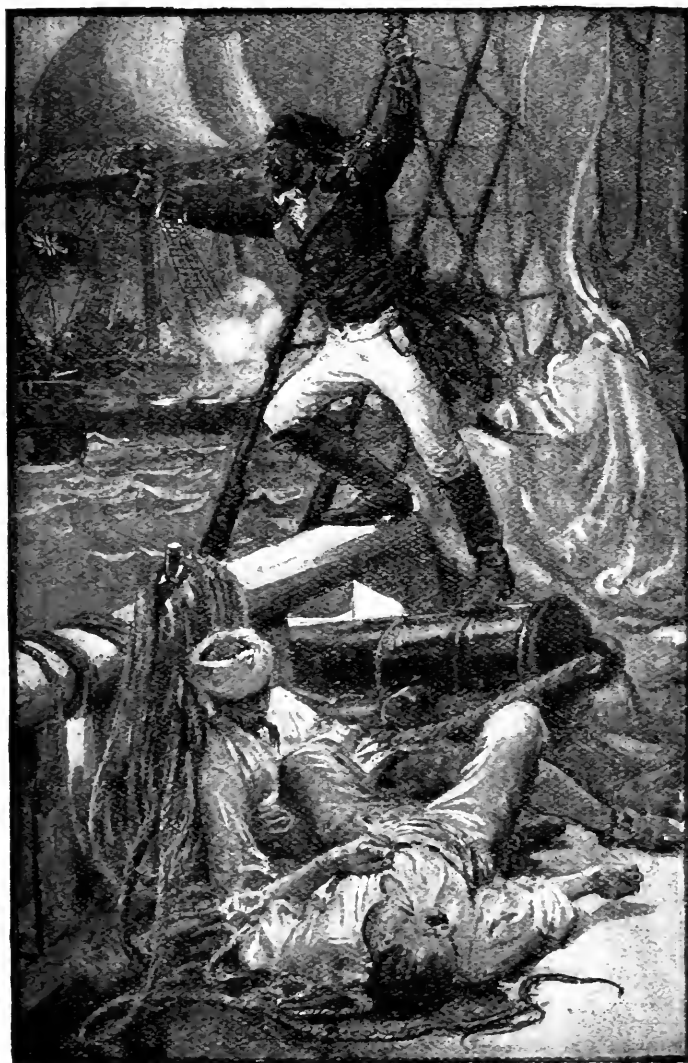
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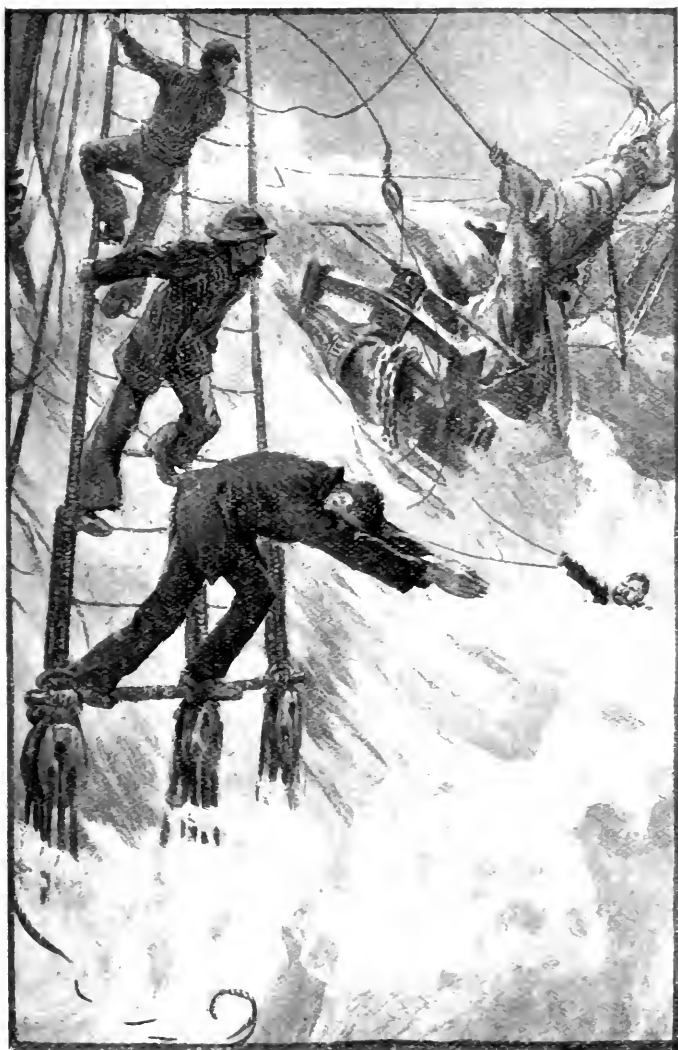
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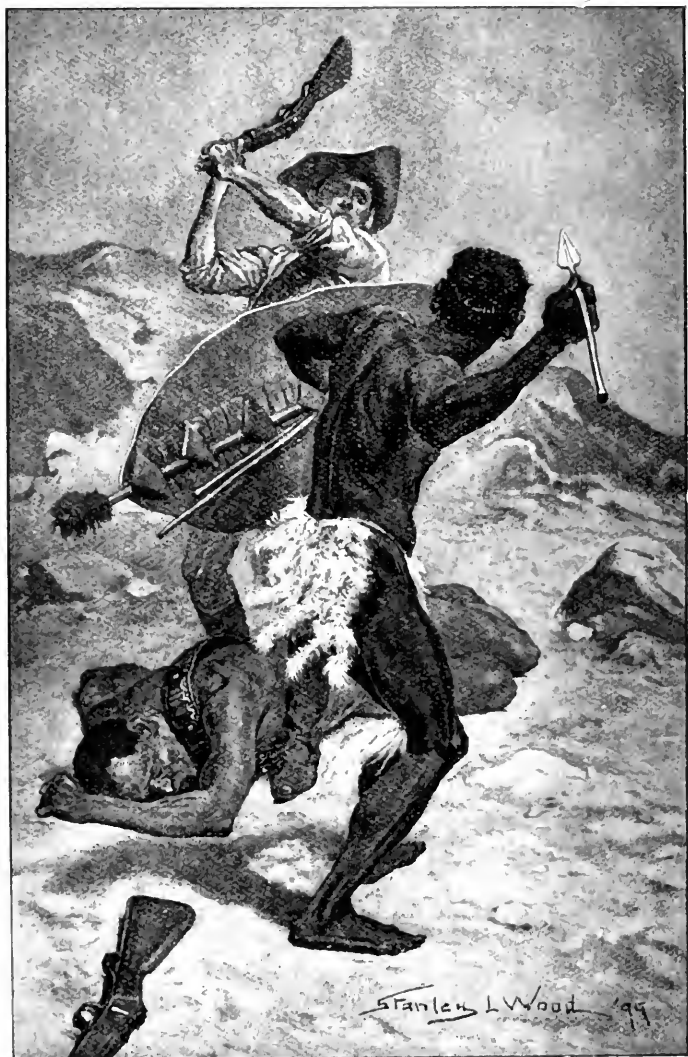
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